ART AND THE REVOLUTIONARY CONTENT OF AYI KWEI ARMAH'S NOVELS, (With special reference to TWO THOUSAND SEASONS)

By

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This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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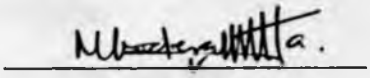

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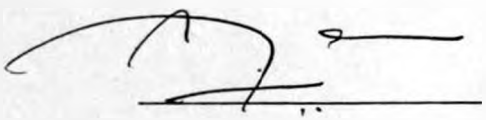

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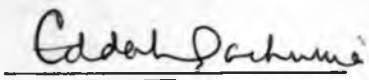

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to Ayi Kwei Armah,

for creating the faultless Prince Appia,

for that indomitable vision in "our way, the way."

and in the re-assurance: "beyond all the despair, is hope,

there are "healing" possibilities for mankind ..."

And to Vivie, child of the Universe:

"In loss and absence, there is always an eternal presence."

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But I am as grateful to the people whose love, kindness or company, has supported me morally and spiritually during very difficult times: Chweya, Opondo, Nakitare and Ocholla Tom, for inspiring comradeship. To Hellen, for such love and kindness even when I hardly deserved any. To Rissie, the only source of my respite, and my parents, Susan and Julius OUTA, whose sense of an education remains cherished.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an analysis of the art and the Revolutionary content of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels with a special focus on Two Thousand Seasons. It looks at the influences that have shaped the man's ideas as well as his artistic intuition. His stay in the United States of America and his experiences while living in the Socialist Republic of Tanzania are found to be instructive. The nature and form of his art appear to express his sympathies with the influential view of the Martiniquan psychiatrist, the late Frantz Fanon. These views inspire a veritable amount of radicalism in art and are pertinent to our analysis of the content of Armah's five published novels. They also partly shape our theoretical framework, namely the school of criticism in which the works themselves are the basis of any judgments.

The concept of revolutionary content is seen as having to do with the kind of change that ensures fairness and justice in a society. It is the manner in which Armah's artistic strategies (taken generally as the shape) depart from familiar conventions and the manner in which the content yearns for positive change, that the study finds revolutionary.

This revolutionary content is traced from the first novel published in 1968 to the last, published in 1978. The unique characterization in The Healers, the use of peculiar images, and the use of peculiar language are definitive of the artistic intuition. The analysis of Two Thousand Seasons shows that the novel offers the best illustration of a revolutionary content. This content is given an equal artistic form to convey it, namely the epic narrative mode with all its powerful qualities. This is subtly treated by the author as to make it an instrument of criticism and not praise as in the traditional context. The content of Two Thousand Seasons tries to approximate life as it is lived by people engaged in a struggle for justice and freedom. In the unique fusion of form and content in the action-oriented novel, Two Thousand Seasons outmatches The Healers and becomes the

apex of the writer's creative talent.

It is our conclusion in this study that writers with a revolutionary message do employ unique artistic strategies to put it across. This study is not a final statement on a writer who espouses so much artistic variety. The specific meaning or meanings of Armah's imagery and symbolism is one area that needs exclusive and detailed attention. The other is his manifestly changed attitude towards women between the first three novels and the latter two. In these, it is hoped that we have made a contribution to the analysis and appreciation of the works of an important contemporary African writer.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND TO ARMAH

In this chapter, we spell out some of the key concepts that define the specific problem of the study. It ends with an examination of the informing ideas and influences that have no doubt shaped this writer's creative career. All these are indispensable to the correct understanding and interpretation of Ayi Kwei Armah's work.

By "Art", we are invoking the entirety of this general concept to help us include all the elements which, in our view, constitute the strategy of Armah in delivering his "content". It is the artistic, formal elements embraced in the concept of art that help distinguish literature from other written material. It implies the imaginative and the creative dimensions of the writer, and it is these that we shall be exploring in our analysis of Two Thousand Seasons. Our concept of art will, therefore, mean and include all that goes by the description of form.

"Form" as an aspect of the artistic genius has been defined as the shape.[1] In the Chambers 20th Century dictionary, it is further seen as "the mould; the style and arrangement, structural unity in music and literature.. a prescribed set of words or action."[2] This analysis will take into account the obvious fact that many critics of Armah have already identified a substantial number of these elements. Yet, it is significant that none of those critic has ever attempted to relate these formal choices to the content. The result has been that Armah's formal elements have been dismissed as constituting non-literary tendencies in their remarkable deviation from familiar methods. In the specific study of Two Thousand Seasons some of these artistic elements include "the epic nature" of the work noted by many critics; the use of myths and what Isidore Okpewho has called "mythification"[3]; the apparent absence of a social setting[4]; the peculiar experiments with language as to create nouns from verbs and so on[5]. We shall explore the language of

Armah's novel, dubbed by some readers as being "vulgar"[6] in an effort to find meaning in such usage. The specific interest in the concept of "art" is, therefore, inasfar as it will help underscore the relationship between form and content and also provide us with an interpretive meaning within the overall framework of the writer's vision.

The second concept that demands a definition and elucidation is "revolutionary content" as used in this study. "Revolutionary" derives from the concept of revolution as generally upheld in politics. Writers on "Revolution" have almost as a rule, noted that it is a problem concept when it comes to a definitive meaning. There seems to be a general consensus however, that some substantial change in society is implied each time the concept is used. In The Anatomy of Revolution, Crane Brinton notes that despite being one of those loose words, its focus has to do with some "drastic, sudden substitution of one group in charge of the running of a territorial political entity for another group."[7] A.S.Cohan in Theories of Revolution notes that the scope of the term is quite wide but two categories tend to be definitive. There is what he calls "the Great revolution" which includes the Marxian types such as Lenin, Mao and Castro. These kinds of revolution he summarizes, amount to "a reconstruction of the state."[8] In the second category, which is much broader, "all transfers of power that are extra legal and/or violent"[9] are included in addition to all the former. Hannah Arendt in On Revolution, asserts that "violence is no more adequate to describe the phenomenon of revolution than change: only where change occurs in the sense of a new beginning, where violence is used to constitute an altogether different form of government to bring about the formation of a new body politic, where the liberation from oppression aims at least at the constitution of freedom, can we speak of revolution."[10]

And lastly, Chalmers Johnson in Revolutionary Change writes that revolutionary change is a special kind of change:

> One that involves the intrusion of violence into civil social relations. And

> revolutions both as a form of behavior and as a concept concerns the most basic level of man's communal existence - its constitution in the Aristotelian sense of the principles of distributive justice prevailing in a particular society.[11]

These four authoritative definitions of revolution and what is revolutionary will suffice to give an idea of what the concept entails broadly. What is to be noted is that all these writers do take "change" to be critical to any meaningful definition of the term. The "Revolutionary content" of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels does, in the first instance, refer to his central message about radical change in the broad African context. By analyzing this content in the main novel studied here, Two Thousand Seasons, we aim to show that its aim is to call for a radical overhaul of the structure of the system and practice of life in African countries in particular and the world in general.

Within the parameters of this study, we define this revolutionary content to include the deliberate search for alternatives and new values for Africans and for humanity as a whole. This, of necessity, includes "spiritual alternatives", the search for which Armah achieves best in The Healers.[12]

In our African literature, the search for alternative values is age-old. Yet the best of the continent's writers have been caught up in the fray of Marxist solutions derived from reading Marxist literature. For Ayi Kwei Armah, the search for lasting changes entailed in his own understanding of revolution, has curved its own peculiar path. The stress for Armah is on practicality rather than on empty theorizing. He, therefore, defines the revolutionary as "... a participant in "actual praxis, in a movement that overturns an oppressive social system replacing the oppressive rulers with the oppressed."[13] This notion of revolution is based on what Armah specifically calls "ideo-praxis" meaning in his own words, "the translation of ideology into behavior and life style ... Ideo praxis is the yard stick that separates revolutionary performers from phonies."[14] In this article[15], so far, the

most authoritative on Armah's conceptual tools, he stresses that revolutionary activity is not even "a very talkative activity."[16] ... It is not even all that demonstrative, but it is active. The revolutionary, according to Fanon, inserts himself quietly among his people.

> This is a pivotal formulation, but because it is so understated its myriad implications escape the casual readers. Cabral adds that in the revolutionary process the desire for visibility is a teething disease and that massive crowds gathered to make demonstrations of an insurrectionary yearning before the enemy, makes no sense. Quiet, selective, effective, efficient, initiatives do. Cabral is on ancestral ground here: the meliorative secret society is nothing new in Africa ...[17] (Emphasis, ours).

We have quoted Armah at length here because the peculiar understanding of revolutionary activity sets him quite apart from other African writers who also believe in change. In our analysis of Two Thousand Seasons, we show how the content subscribes to this notion of "ideo-praxis", especially in the strategies for initiating revolution, and thus change. The artistic strategies employed for conveying such a content are remarkably distinct from others in African Literature, but even more so, from the European literature where "form" has sometimes been used for mere pleasure or entertainment. Indeed the revolutionary spirit of African writing at the formal level, finds its best expression in our opinion, in the works of Ayi Kwei Armah. The spirit of African writing is aptly described by Olusola Oke as "... the literature of social relevance."[18]

The word "content" also needs explanation. As a literary concept it has always had to do with containing.[19] It is in this sense that we use it in this study. The concern of the novelist is best expressed through the content. It is the ever valid principle of the mutual co-existence between form and content that ultimately justifies a work of art. It is because of this that our study has chosen to look at these two element together. In Armah's Two Thousand Seasons the two elements of art or form and content, enjoy a mutual interdependence that give great value and meaning to the work. This of itself

justifies the study, as it is an area that to the best of my knowledge, has not been adequately explored in Armah. Thus briefly stated, "Art and the Revolutionary content of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels", will mean a close evaluation of how these two component elements of literary work, enjoy a consolidated front in the process of fighting and liberation; the process of seeking change and newness in the African continent, through its art works.

This study found Armah's theoretical position to be so out of the ordinary that it becomes absolutely necessary to explain some of these as a key to a proper understanding of the man's works. His declared mode of operation as an African writer constitutes some of the most informing ideas about his works in their entirety. "Larsony"[20] was the first article he ever wrote, at the height of what he considered to be great provocation by a western critic of African literature. He had this to say of his style:

> Many African writers discuss their work and themselves quite willingly, sometimes even eagerly with western critics, newspapermen, magazines pundits, radio commentators, television hosts and just plain dilettantes, that is their choice. I don't .... I have never granted any interview about my person or my work, no matter how prestigious the publication asking for it. I have never gone on lecture tours, I have never, till now, found it necessary to write any article about my writing (Emphasis, ours).[21]

This, certainly, is a baffling stance from a writer who has in his own right become so famous; with works that elicit so much response from readers and critics alike. What is of interest is that in making such a declaration, Armah must have been one of a very rare kind in Africa. What it means in the light of any study on Armah, is first, that by opting to remain a mystic as it were, room has been created for too much general speculation about some issues of detail. But this is in as far as some critics have traditionally been over-concerned about what has been called background information. Of course this concern with background has its own advantages, say as in the illumination of some aspects of a work. One, therefore, appreciates the problems Larson and his likes may

have run into in trying to write about Armah and maintain their reputation as experts on African literature. This is how "Larsony" came about; Armah's name for those he calls his enemies because they use "fiction to criticize fiction."[22]

On the other hand however, this study believes, or rather thinks that in the absence of unnecessary comments from a writer, an ideal, impartial situation is created in which it is the literature - the works themselves - that form the basis of any analysis or comment. In the present instance, it is the works themselves that become the supplementing source if one were to piece together some biographical details. The assumption is that creative works are often imbued with discernible life details which the writers use to create. In this kind of reconstruction process, one is capable of deducing a writer's reaction to a historical moment, or the details of his upbringing without necessarily having precise dates.

However, the fundamental point one is making is that too much loudness and conspicuity for a writer with a political purpose in mind, is to use Armah's own word, "senseless".[23] Writers have been rightly seen throughout history as seers or prophets and if they must come out in public, it needs to be only occasional and significant. Writers like Armah's own fictional Akosua Russel in Fragments[24] who wearies down her audience by reading the same poem year in, year out is a tragic statement on how creativity can be so compromised to opportunism and economic gain. In such a situation, a writer cannot claim to be a revolutionary at all.

It means from this premise that in Armah's five novels, one can "read" a lot of biographical insight. Often there is no doubt that the writer is the tortured being like Baako in Fragments, searching for new values and new meaning in life. More importantly, we can read definite ideological attitudes through such intimate experience of Solo and Modin in Why Are We So Blest?[25] In this novel and in Two Thousand Seasons,[26] one is

left in no doubt at all about Armah's own feelings about Black-White relations even when we read these experiences through other characters. The most important characters in so far as this revolutionary content is concerned include, "Teacher" in The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born;[27] Baako and Juana in Fragments, Isanusi in Two Thousand Seasons, and Densu and Damfo in The Healers. These characters shall be discussed in subsequent chapters. For the moment, we must turn to give some mention on Armah the man, having in mind that he keeps secret personal life matters.

As far as the man's biography goes, it is usually surmised in such brief: Born in Takoradi, Ghana in 1939, educated at Achimota school and Harvard University from 1959. He has since 1970, lived at Dar-es-Salaam, writing.[28] Only a few generous blurbs have added a line or two to include the working life, such as Armah's career in Algiers as a translator for the magazine Revolution Africaine; script writer on Ghana television, teacher of English at Navrongo school and translating editor in Jeune Afrique, in Paris, France. Even for the German published Who is Who in African Literature[29], Armah was not to reveal much about himself. But there is the slight addition that Armah participated in the graduate writing programme of Columbia University in 1967. In "Larsony"[30], Armah asserts that travelling is an integral part of the Akan mans' life and that's exactly what he has been doing. Thus it is no surprise that the last known place he has been seen in recently is Senegal. As though to confirm this, his most unusual characteristics Armah told the interviewer that he is currently learning "Hieroglyphics", the ancient Egyptian writing technique, so as to be able to read the Bible in the original. He repeats that his trotting around Africa in particular, and the world in general is part of a "deliberate process of self-education" in the continuing search for the values that Africa has lost over the years.[31]

This amount of biography is insufficient for the critic looking for explanations to many aspects of Armah's writing. In particular, nearly all the critics of Armah have taken

exception to some of his passages which infact can be very morally distressing. Indangasi[32] for instance, finds it difficult to compromise "vulgarity" with works of art like Armah's that "have a certain amount of claim to seriousness." Chinua Achebe dubbs The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born. "a sick book"[33] while Charles Nnolim submits that "Armah did not have to spill vomit on white paper in his first novel to depict for us the corruption that had eaten deep into the social fabrics of Ghana.[34]

In our approach we find that some of these passages in question are easily explained by a careful reading of Why Are We So Blest? They have to do with the "American years". Armah lived in the United States of America from 1959 to 1963 and again in 1964. Between 1968 and 1970, he was again there in hospital suffering from what seems to be the great mental strain alluded to in Why Are We So Blest? and so graphically captured through the experience of Baako in Fragments. The fifties and the sixties, spilling right into the seventies were significant years in the American society and especially so for the Blacks. There is sense in which Why Are We So Blest? is almost biographical in its rendition of these "American years". It appears to have forced our writer to come up with race typologies that seem so apparent in the book, and other subsequent ones. America was an extremely race conscious society and this became traumatic for Black foreigners in that country. The hallmark of this period was the renewed fight by Blacks to gain their democratic and civil rights which ages of institutionalized oppression had denied. In people like Malcom's and Martin Luther King's civil rights movement, there emerged a new dawn of asserting the basic human rights of the Black American. Every Black American was justifiably calling for a new society that would be free for all and particularly one that did not oppress on the basis of race and skin color. Martin Luther King's words capture the general mood and feeling of the period:

> Being a negro in America means trying to smile when you want to cry. It means trying to hold on to physical life amid psychological death ... It means being harried by day and haunted by night by a nagging sense of nobodiness

> and constantly fighting to be saved from the poison of bitterness. It means the ache and anguish of living in so many situations where hopes unborn have died.[35]

In Why Are We So Blest? as in Two Thousand Seasons, there is a corollary to such circumstances with as much weight and emphasis. Apart from the familiar exploitative relations between the west and Africa, Armah draws attention to the fact that the exploiters in these circumstances have graduated beyond economic exploitation to the weird forms of social and sexual exploitation. The precise nature of this latter kind of exploitation is discussed in our analysis of Modin and Aime as representatives given by Armah in Why Are We So Blest?

From America, the other significant insight into Armah is provided by the fact of his career in Algeria where he also did translation work for a magazine, in 1963. In the same year, Armah also visited Mexico, the Central American country which had also experienced a national revolution years earlier. Armah's particular interest in Algeria has been easily explained by his deep seated interest in participating in the much publicized Algerian Revolution (1953-1961). In his interview with African Concord recently, he makes nostalgic reference to this failure to actually participate in the revolution as a fighter:

> I would like to go into peoples lives, I mean, actually affect them and get involved. I think it is really absurd never to have participated physically.[36] (Emphasis, ours)

Algeria was not just the setting for the revolution. It was also the setting that shaped the ideas and the thoughts of the Martiniquean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon whose influence on African writers has been quite widely acknowledged. Armah has himself registered his appreciation of the contribution of Fanon to the "consistent formulations concerning a revolutionary re-structuring of African society."[37] In this introductory background, it is imperative to highlight in what areas Fanon's thinking exactly influenced Armah as this is central to an appreciation of Two Thousand Seasons. One, however, has

to be a little hesitant in talking about influence or indebtedness because Armah believes that ideas are universal. To use his words, "the fashion of naming ideas after individuals is inherently immature. A better way would be to treat ideas as ideas, not private property."[38] The best approach would then to be to show in what areas the two thinkers concur in their perceptive analysis of African historical experience.

Fanon's uppermost concern in his most influential book, The Wretched of the Earth[39] was freedom of the oppressed people from both colonial and Neo-colonial enslavement. His book, therefore, provides one of the most profoundly observant analysis of the colonial and Neo-colonial experience, with an unequivocal theory for dismantling oppression. To educate himself, Fanon decided to be at the very helm of the Algerian revolution from the mid-fifties till he died in 1961. He became a practicing revolutionary among the fighting cadres during the revolution where he also served them as a medical doctor. When he was expelled from Algeria on what certainly was the profound threat his abilities gave to the French, he became the roving ambassador of the Algerians, espousing their cause throughout Africa and the world.

The essence of Fanon's profoundly analytical observations in The Wretched of the Earth, is, therefore, primarily that he offered an original ideological frame of reference, for explaining the oppressive conditions of blacks and other non-white peoples in the colonies so dominated by whites. In the book, his is a diagnosis of the ills of Africa and the third world as a whole, caught up in an oppressive relationship with Europe, and the west. Fanon argues that there had been no effective decolonization in Africa because the colonial structures had not been destroyed. What happened at independence was the Africanization of colonialism. There could be no effective decolonization and consequently no freedom, so long as the colonial structures persisted; and to destroy colonialism effectively, violence was indispensable. Violence which infact takes nearly one quarter of

Fanon treatise, destroys not only the formal structures of colonial rule but also the alienated consciousness that colonial rule has implanted in the mind of the native. He, therefore, propounds a theory of social action and makes a passionate plea for revolutionary decolonization and the creation of a free society in which man would acquire authentic existence. His vision of the ideal society was that of a socialist populist democracy, a combination of Marx Rousseau in which man would be free to maintain and express his nature.[40]

Ayi Kwei Armah must have been quite substantially impressed by this perception of the African historical experience. This perception of history, and especially the inevitability of violence to uproot the oppression, find full expression and affirmation in Armah's Two Thousand Seasons.[41] One of the areas in which Armah and Fanon are so manifestly bound is that throughout their concern with freedom and liberation, none of them advances any socialist slogans supposedly as the only way out.

The use of bureaucratic tendencies such as the mass party politics as guise for autocracy is specifically attacked by Fanon. Evils such as corruption, grabbing, hypocrisy in the leadership and the "theory of tutelage" in which some self acclaimed messiahs decide to patronize the majority, is our familiar diet in African politics, which Fanon detected so early and accordingly rejected.

For Armah, the task of re-structuring society depends heavily on "ideo-praxis" which as we have seen is an action oriented life style where ideas are only used to determine the precise nature of praxis. This again is an area in which the two are clearly agreed. Fanon writes:

> ...Without that struggle, without that knowledge of the practice of action, there is nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of the trumpets. There's nothing, save a minimum of re-adaptation, a few reforms at the top, a flag waving: and down there at the bottom an undivided mass, still living in the middle ages, endlessly marking time.[42]

In the final analysis it is perhaps Fanon's conclusion in his treatise that we find the greatest influence on Armah. Fanon concluded strongly and unequivocally that the only way out for African nations was to entirely sever all relationships with Europe if at all ever, the dream of freedom was to be realized:

> Let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her.[43]

He continued in similar vein as we shall see in Armah, that:

> It is a question of the third world starting a new history of man, a history which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man, and consisted in the pathological tearing apart of his function and the crumbling away of his unity.[44]

It is this conclusion that summarizes Fanon's ultimate vision for Africa, and indeed, it speaks for itself.

From Fanon, the only other source from which we can compile Armah's mode of operation is from the paper which we have made reference to. It is this paper which shows Armah's working philosophy as a tuition of various experiences and exposures; including the influence we have shown to derive from Fanon.

One of the most important observations Armah makes in the paper is that his vocation as an artist primarily, "includes the search for regenerative values."[45] Hence he declares that he has no apologies to make in discussing matters that would seem to fall within the province of political science if it is within the spirit of "pointing out the correct path."[46] In the language of our main novel Two Thousand Seasons, this correct path is an equivalent of "our way, the way."[47] Armah then spells out his role as a revolutionary which we have extensively discussed - but he does not stop there. He argues that vocation of the liberator, even in the realm of art, is not something for which individuals or the few ideologists should take all the credit for. In Europe, liberation ideas were associated with specific names such as Marx, Lenin or Mao, but our writer finds this to be an unnecessary

glorification of individuals. This approach, it will be appreciated, is fresh in its daring and challenge.

The paper proceeds to dispel certain basic tenets of Marxism, submitting in the process that Marxism could not have avoided being racist. This is so according to Armah because, for one, its informing history was almost entirely European and not African or oriental. Armah argues that the linear philosophy of history, namely the presumption by Marx and Engels that society moved in stages, with Europe at the top, was misinformed as it was not applicable to Africa. He submits that there are infact "cyclical" philosophies of history which imply the interplay of multiple significant factors before a history is determined, and not just two.

For Armah, the human ideal is, universal justice, and he shows quite authoritatively how men everywhere have always sought it:

> An intelligent and honest approach would acknowledge that communism and revolution are universal value systems and phenomena: Universal, not in the obtuse liberal sense of something westerners dream of imposing on the world, but in the sharp common sense of something any unprejudiced searcher ;may find throughout the world among different peoples.[48]

Oppression and exploitation are phenomenon that have always concerned all well informed Africans, and Ayi Kwei Armah is no exception. If his art is to be found steaming with some fire of what some critics call "anti-racist racism", it is simply because as a fighter he has no option but to fight age-old bigotry that has always associated Europe with the best of everything , and Africa with the worst. As an illustration, Armah cites art:

> Western racists hold western art is art but African art is primitive. Western poetry when it respects organic unit of sense and form, but African poetry fused with that respect from birth is only primitive..[49]

It is quite clear that Armah does not subscribe to the kind of revolutionary changes that are often associated with Marxism. His dissatisfaction with a number of Marx's assertions reflects a very careful re-assessment of Marxism as a liberation ideology. For

instance, Armah challenges the notion of material abundancy as a pre-condition to Marxist socialism, a presumption which he argues has been annulled by precise historical experience. Also, the dogmas advance by marx, of peasant stupidity is questioned for its inherent inhumanity, and the fact that Marx and Engels fell prey to ideas and attitudes fashionable in their time.[50] In Armah's The Healers, we shall see how Armah creates simple peasants who are, unlike in Marx's contentions, endowed with tremendous wit and wisdom. He succeeds in this novel and in Two Thousand Seasons to advance the Fanonian perception, that peasant based revolutions are "patient, protracted and stoically democratic", as opposed to the "hurried, swift seizure of power by the urban (proletarian) revolutionaries". There is in short, no "purposive scale of values" to support and argue for peasant stupidity.[51]

In the 1970's Armah found it necessary to live and write in Dar-es-salaam where he wrote at least two novels - Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers. It is clear that these were also the most productive years for Armah; when one would say that he topped his writing career. The choice to live and operate from Tanzania cannot be ignored in any correct appreciation of the writer. Former President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere had in 1967 championed the famous Arusha declaration by which he sought to guide Tanzania through a path of self reliance towards an African kind of socialism. Nyerere's experiment guided by the Arusha document, became one of the most popular experiments of a political nature undertaken by an African president. Its indigenous African drive; its daring in rejecting western capitalists mode of development and instead emphasizing self reliance, was bound to attract people like Armah who had already demonstrated a keen sense of interest in an African inspired revolution. There is every sense in which the Tanzanian experiment was, and is a revolutionary event in African political experience:

> By the use of the word "Ujamaa", therefore, we state that for us socialism involves building on the foundation of our past, and building also to our own design. We are not importing a foreign ideology into Tanzania and trying to

> smother our distinct social patterns with it. We have deliberately decided to grow, as a society out of our roots, but in a particular direction towards a particular kind of objective..[52]

It was the specific mission of the Arusha declaration of 29th January, 1967[53] to steer Tanzania into this kind of socialist state. It is not for this study to debate the achievements or failure of Nyerere's socialism. What is beyond any doubt is that for many African "revolutionaries" - if any have existed, it represented a welcome departure from a history of colonialism and neo-colonialism. This is something Armah definitely admired, and sought to experience by an actual involvement . In the "Ujamaa villages", there was hope and prospect for sharing in scarcity as in plenty, a notion advanced by Armah as crucial to revolutionary life.[54] But perhaps the most lasting experience for Armah in Tanzania has been Nyerere's firm and determined choice to sever relations with Europe and America and to leave the task of national development to Tanzanians. Nyerere has consistently rejected the overtures of the International Monetary Fund and its excessive zeal in dictating fiscal policies for young nations. Tanzanians according to this new mood had learn to provide for themselves. If then critics of Nyerere would want to accuse him of having gradually led a nation to poverty, he at least attempted to create an African Nation with a national and patriotic outlook; a nation which we would say after Achebe, regained its belief in itself. This is what is relevant for this study.

In the next chapter, it shall be the task to show more closely how our concept of "revolutionary content" has grown in Armah's creative works. It will be the analysis of the growth of a revolutionary vision from 1968 to 1978 when he wrote his last novel. The analysis will focus on all his novels, save for Two Thousand Seasons which given the fullest analysis in Chapter 3, as the apex of this study.

The leading theoretical approach to this study is provided by Armah himself, in the two papers to which we have extensively referred.[55] In his criticism of Larson, he deigned

to describe who a literary interpreter should have been , as one who must function in "close tune" with all the prejudices of his audience, respecting and protecting them and above all, censoring information before transmitting it."[56]

In "Masks and Marx", Armah added the dimension already seen, that the serious African artist must combine the craft of creativity with the search for "regenerative values."[57] As a framework this means that Armah's works studied here cannot be seen outside this context of search or quest for values that re-inspire a seemingly daunted African spirit. Such inspiring models provided by the artist, does not have to be appended to any individuals, societies or particular ideologies, but are rather aimed at strengthening mankind as a whole.

Such theoretical framework has been advocated by several radical artists throughout literary history. Bretch, despite being a Marxist, still had room for the kind of interpretation that allows room for..."skills newly acquired by contemporary man..."[58] He argued that if anything were to constitute a scientific approach in the interpretation of literature it would have to be that capacity to investigate "the effects of the artistic adoption in each specific case."[59] Accordingly, Brecht protected the artists freedom to "conjure things out of the air, to work through a large section of a continuous process more or less consciously."[60]

It is these very conjurations, infact conscious acts by Ayi Kwei Armah, that make his art so different. We shall accept along Brechts lines that, too detailed literary models, and too rigid rules of narrative should not be used to bind an artist, or to dismiss his work. Olsen sums it all:

> The requirements of coherence and interest demand that a reader should set aside his own personally preferred conceptual scheme when he interprets a work, and use only such terms as are acceptable interpretive terms, and only such higher level terms as make the work cohere..[61]

He concludes:

...So reading literature demands intellectual honesty, discipline, ability to suppress personal prejudices, unsuitable emotional reactions, and so on.[62]

CHAPTER 2

THE GROWTH OF ARMAH'S REVOLUTIONARY VISION

In this chapter we underscore the specific nature of the content which we have so far only generally described as "Revolutionary". This entails an analysis of Armah's writings from the time of his emergence in 1968, to the last novel written in 1978. The analysis of the fourth novel, Two Thousand Seasons is spared in this chapter as it will be given most attention in chapter three. It is appropriate that we mention here that although The Healers is Armah's most recent novel (1978), in our opinion, Armah's artistic peak is in the fourth novel, Two Thousand Seasons. It is for this reason that the latter will form the climax of our enquiry in this study.

We do not impute a chronological sense in the concept of growth used in this chapter. Growth in art would not simply mean a movement from a relative state of youth to one of maturity. We are more concerned with the persistence of the humane vision throughout a writer's works, and what techniques he uses to capture such social changes. Indeed, it has been aptly noted,

> Growth in literature does not imply improvement. There is nothing in the development of art analogous with material progress. Art does not get better. Its manifestations merely change.[1]

The four novels to be looked at here in perspective are The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968)[2], Fragments (1969)[3] Why Are We So Blest? (1972)[4] and The Healers (1978)[5]

The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born was Armah's first novel. On its publication in 1968, it straight away set the tradition of "disillusionment in the African novel" a phrasing that refers to the response by African writers to the era of independence which was rapidly loosing its initial zeal and enthusiasm. The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born is a novel about Ghana soon after independence. Its story unfolds around one unnamed

character simply referred to as "the man", and also one auxiliary character, "teacher". Man and teacher are saints in hell, so to speak, seeking to escape a sordid reality of utter chaos and squalor that pervade their very political, social and economic reality. This portrayed reality appears to represent Armah's misgivings about independent Ghana, while the two characters appear as representations of the writers quest for alternatives in a situation desperately hopeless. The climax of the novel is an inevitable military coup in which the beneficiaries of independence are booted out, but tragically to be replaced by rulers who sing the same old tunes.

The plot of the novel is however, much more intricate than this. It involves various glimpses into the various facets of Ghana's national life during this point in time. The corruption and stealing in public life, is not just captured by the instance where the timber dealer offers "the man" a bribe to have his timber transported, which man refuses, only to be grabbed by a less bothered colleague: It is as well manifested in the bus conductor in the very first chapter, who steals from unsuspecting passengers by giving wrong change!

Such then, are the glimpses into Ghanaian life after independence, till at the end of the novel, many critics harrow at the despair. Ghanaian politicians ably cut out in Koomson, as the profiteer grabber, are so immoral that not even a military take over can convince the people that change would come.

The apparent pessimism on the part of the writer, especially the implications of such despair is what has led critics to undermine what Gikandi has ably identified as "the truth value or usefulness"[6] of such a depiction. Indeed, critical opinion on this book can be said to waver between those early critics who never saw beyond the so-called "despair", and the more perceptive "modern" interpretation of the text.

Soon after publication, eminent critic of African literature, Eldred Jones wrote of The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born:

> The dominating mood of the novel is one of hopeless despair.

> This is emphasized by an image pattern organized around filth, corruption, decay and defecation...[7]

Chinua Achebe, a leading African writer was even more disturbing in his clearly negative comments. He charged that Armah's novel was a "sick book" and that the writer's Ghana was "unrecognizable".[8] He continued:

> Ultimately the novel failed to convince me. And this was because Armah insists that this story is happening in Ghana and not in some modern existentialist no man's-land. He throws in quite a few realistic ingredients like Kwame Nkrumah to prove it. And that is a mistake...[9]

The respectable Achebe then went on:

> Ayi Kwei Armah imposes so much foreign metaphor on the sickness of Ghana, that it ceases to be true.[10]

There is no doubt that this latter statement alone was a hyperbolic judgement by Achebe, because such charges as use of foreign metaphors and lack of identification, are to say the least, false.

It is in the same trend that Charles Nnolim's[11] criticism falls. He not only accuses our present writer of "pouring vomit on white paper" but also being a complete lesson is despair and "pejorism". Nnolim commences his tirade by saying:

> Armah is a perjorist (by which he means ..." one who views the world as undergoing an inevitable corruption and doom.) He is a writer whose philosophic pessimism is undisguised in each work. Armah is a writer of decadence.[12] (Emphasis, ours)

It is the opinion of this study that what these critics regard as "hopeless despair", "sickness" or "perjorism", are fundamentally a proof of the power of the writer's idiolect and general stylistic accomplishment. It is significant, that Eldred Jones reluctantly concedes that Armah's language in this novel is "unpleasantly apt."[13] The other observations are in fact correct, yet they proceed on wrong analytical principles to dismiss a writer so unequivocally successful. To be able to represent the Ghanaian situation in such biting images and metaphors, cannot be merely analyzed as an achievement in pessimism and

despair. Armah's choice of language in such lines as "the generous gob of mucus"[14] have no doubt, "the power to wound" as Dennis Brutus[15] in a different context poeticises.

What is further striking about Achebe's criticism of Armah is the accusation that the reference to Kwame Nkrumah is an exercise in name dropping, supposedly to absolve the writer from the lack of authenticity. Even if one were to ignore Armah's open reference to Ghana and the mention of Nkrumah; or to be even more conceding to Achebe, if a reader unwittingly escaped the fleeting mention of Ghana and Nkrumah, the novel would still be anything but at the very least, sure of its Ghanaian African setting! There can be no doubt that Armah captures the wide-spread mentality of the typical citizen to profiteer and take advantage of almost anything within reach, and the mentality of the man in power to be corrupt and proud as he swims in the ill-gotten wealth at the expense of others. It is this content and the "form" used to represent it that we evaluate in this novel, as specifically constituting the revolutionary vision of the writer. When Achebe thus refers (ironically) in the same breath, to Armah as "a good Ghanaian writer"[16] one should think that this credit is owing to a depiction that would easily fit the rules of "typicality" and realism as generally defined and acceptable in art.

The most striking thing about this novel, is its long title which seeks to make a statement. At one level it creates a well founded impression to a casual reader that the novel is the cheap romance type thriller. This is a deliberate stylistic move; catchy and attention drawing. In the "revolutionary" perspective of this thesis, it can be first suggested that such a title serves to remove to as far as possible, the usual fears of the powers that be, that such a novel would be about them. This is part of the writer's strategy in "revolutionary" circumstances; to clothe powerful revolutionary message in an ironical title such as this. That our continent has records of being vicious on so called "political" writers who want to "sow seeds of discord" cannot be forgotten.[17] The beauty that Armah's novels

seems to be dealing with, goes beyond the familiar type that stresses physique and outward appearance. The familiar beauty is the kind that attracts Oyo - the man's wife, because she is such a mediocre being. It is the beauty that makes Estella Koomson on the other hand, so exuberant and envied by the other woman, yet her's is so tragically confined to the outertrappings of attire, material affluence and inevitable, eventual doom. As we shall see in our analysis of The Healers, the philosophical component of "beauty being born", goes beyond all these to include the beauty of the human soul and more so in a situation so chaotic and wanting as Armah's Ghana.

In dealing with this superior category of beauty, the novel concerns itself with the inner qualities of man; his moral integrity for instance, in the face of tempting opportunities that could be easily turned into personal gain. Teacher and the man are, therefore, earthly angels standing for that rare spiritual strength. They are "clean" beings, despite the overwhelming dirt over and about them. Indeed the setting of the novel in the horrid, "sick" surroundings of Ghana has nothing to do with natural causation. It is man himself; the people of Ghana that are responsible, even for the physical mess:

> In one or two places, the eye that chooses to remain open can see the weird patterns made by thrown wrecks of unmended bicycles and pre-war rollers. Sounds arise and kill all smells as the bus pulls into the dormitory town ... sometimes it is understood that people spit so much. (Emphasis, ours)[18]

The begging question in Armah, from "the man" in the first novel, to Densu in The Healers, is the place of the individual who chooses to distance himself from such mess. He becomes the "Armahric" motif of the insanity of sane people:

> Was there not something in the place and about the time, everything in fact, that sought to make it painfully clear that there was too much of the unnatural in any man who imagines he could escape the inevitable decay of life and not accept the decline into final disintegration? (Emphasis, ours)[19]

Along these premises, it is then to be understood that the teacher's nakedness ceases to be a literal one in the novel. It is one that heightens and emphasizes the moral,

spiritual strength, and not the hollow superfluity that clothes of themselves can suggest. The pomp and glory of the Koomsons in their attire; their highly imposed western European tastes is the mock irony of the so called "gleam". On the day of reckoning, this rather pompous man "His Excellency Joseph Koomson, Minister Plenipotentiary, member of the presidential commission, Hero of socialist labor...,[20] is sent fleeing. He hides right under the bed, in the dingy little room owned by "the man". This scene, one of the most humorous in the novel, heightens Armah's visual power as an artist, because it vividly re-captures Koomson's first visit when he was still in power during which he could not fit in the same house that now offers the much needed hiding.

The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born has what one might call a complicated structure, or as we have previously observed, an intricate plot. It is, therefore, a painstaking novel to read. The first six chapters are rather amorphous, and rather lacking the continuity and flow of the subsequent eight chapters. What happens is that the first chapter introduces a plot for a story along the familiar chronological novel. This plot soon breaks into reflections and reminiscences of a personal nature with man at the center of it. Thus whereas the story of "the man" is still central to the plot, the strand that holds it together is not particularly obvious. Indeed, we realize that he is but an observer, often a non-participant, yet caught up in the overwhelming dirt and filth, deliberately underlined by the author. This kind of "difficult" novel is in our opinion part of the strategy Armah uses consistently, to critique his situations without being too obvious about it.

The environment so established, is then one of physical and moral corruption. It is one of dilapidated buildings like the offices at the railway headquarters, choked up lavatories; foreign business interests dominating the streets, and the compounding craze to make money. To illustrate:

> ... He passed by the gloomy building of the post office and his pace quickened involuntarily as he began descending the steep little hill beyond that. Across the road at the bottom the street lamps perfunctorily gave a

> certain illumination to the shapes of the row of old commercial buildings, and their light bounced dully off the corrugated iron shelters infront of the shop gates beneath which the watchmen slept. He passed the U.T.C., the G.N.T.C., the U.A.C. and the French C.F.A.O... The G.N.T.C., of course, was regarded as a new thing, but only the name had really changed with independence... but the same old stories of money changing hands and palms getting greased. Only this time if the old stories aroused any anger, there was nowhere for it to go. The sons of the nation were now in charge, after all[21]...

Chapters 3-5 portray at some length the state of things in society. There is the monotony of work at the railway headquarters, so satirically described as "usual"; people earning from the national coffers for no definite jobs done, in addition to the steeming corruption. The confrontation with the timber dealer is just one of the many instances in which the man could get rich if he so wished. Later, to avoid the ever accusing eyes of his wife and children he goes to visit his friend "teacher" who as we mentioned is in a staggering state of nakedness. As they talk, they both hear the ironic song playing on radio Ghana where the artist comments on "those blessed with power and the soaring swiftness of the eagle."[22] The crux of the song is that the slow ones - like the man, will too, arrive. The national notion of rushing onward to make it, even if it means death is severely criticized here.

Neil Lazarus has most succinctly evaluated Armah's achievement through these presentation:

> ...The cumulative effect of this "network" of details and symbols in <u>The beautyful Ones</u> is to present the reader with a harrowing and relentless vision of Ghana as a neo-colony.. It is sick to the very core, rotten with the congealed decay centuries of domination, capitulation and betrayal. The society limps into tomorrow, riven, bereft, corrupt, dependant. Its citizens engaged in a ceaseless, debased and dehumanizing struggle simply to eke out their lives from day to day, from passion week to passion week to passion week.[23]

In the anomalous state of things, we are told that it is only "fools and cowards"[24] who bother with such virtues as truth and honesty. As teacher tells man, "you have not done what everybody is doing and in this world that is one of your crimes."[25] In Ghana,

everybody is chasing the "gleam":

> It is the blinding gleam of beautiful new houses and the shine of powerful new mercedes cars.. It is the scent of expensive perfumes and the mass of the new wig.[26]

Part of the problem in the man's household is the wife's belief that he has let them down, even in refusing to take the bribe. The fact that she is not like Estella Koomson, disturbs her beyond the logic of reason; as she tells him:

> ..And why not? When you shook Estella Koomson's hand was not the perfume that stayed on yours, a pleasing thing? May be you like this crawling that we do, but I am tired of it. I would like someone drive me where I want to go.[27]

And to put the very nail "on the man's coffin", she accuses him of being like the "chichidodo" bird:

> "...The Chichidodo hates excretement with all its soul. But the Chichidodo only feeds on maggots, and you know the maggots grow best inside the lavatory.." The woman was smiling.[28]

There is every reason to argue, therefore, that "the man" and "Teacher" are rebels specifically because they distance themselves from what everybody holds as dear. They project the writer's vision of Ghana. For the teacher, we learn that political freedom is nothing if people cannot "consume themselves", that is practically finish themselves for the sake of cherished beliefs. Without this integrity in the handling of national affairs, we witness what Armah describes as "the end of things even in their beginning."[29]

In a further attempt to vivify the symbolism of the naked man, the novelist writes that "the naked body is a covering for a soul once almost destroyed, now full of fear for itself and full of a killing anguish at what this fear makes impossible... But the man has never really known the thing that turned his friend into a human being hiding from other human beings."[30] The important point suggested here is infact the case of the "outward calm" with an inside power of vision in the "watching eye". It is also a state of silent wisdom; of knowing yet being unable to talk since nobody will listen.

The symbolism we must emphasize is a catchy one. By talking about a naked body, Armah succeeds in commanding the readers attention and so in fact preach the superior philosophy of an inner consciousness that is definitely above clothes.

Armah further uses the symbolism of the cave allegory drawn from Plato's theory of knowledge to vivify the issues at hand.[31] Plato's cave, writes Armah, "is a story of impenetrable darkness and chains within a deep and carvenous hole, holding people who for ages had seen nothing outside their shadowy forms."[32]

The "man" who corresponds to Plato's rejected philosopher, represents what Armah gives as "the one unfortunate being, able to break out of these chains, and to wonder outward from the eternal circle of the lightless cave."[33] The cave at this level, is what in Plato's theory is responsible for the philosopher's ignorance since life in the cave deludes him from perceiving the correct reality. The seclusion practiced by the man and teacher, does not however, imply this kind of ignorance, and this is the main point Armah seeks to make. Their's is really personal sacrifice because to leave the cave is to be confronted by the dazzling elegance outside which whets everyone's appetite. As Henry Chakava has pointed out, Armah's aim here is to refute the platonic logic in the cave simile, that evil in society would be resultant upon lack of knowledge.[34] In this case, it is "the blinding beauty of all the lights and colors,"[35] that constitute the attractive outside reality which makes society reject this only possible saviour. It is the two levels of meaning of the cave, that one needs to stress. First, it can be seen in the platonic sense as the representation of society's presumed lack of knowledge. Its darkness and the resultant misconception that the shadow (as Plato calls them) is the reality. Secondly, the cave is a sanctuary for the disillusioned, where the rejected, yet knowledgeable man gets momentary respite. It is this latter meaning which accounts for the man's occasional retreats back to the cave. Margaret Folarin seems to have correctly identified this point:

> ...It is important to notice that man is not a typical cave dweller. He only

> participates in cave life up to a point.. His loneliness is that of someone who belongs to two worlds which oppose each other, his alliance with both prevents him participating in either.[36]

So in the symbolism of the cave, it comes out clearly once again, that Ayi Kwei Armah proposes a superior philosophical consciousness on the part of those who should be accepted as leaders. It is a statement on the kind of rigor in leadership that Armah requires, that he takes us back to the master philosopher for this kind of analogy.

The foregoing analysis should suffice on the general "Revolutionary" perspective of Armah's first novel, namely the quest for deep spiritual excellence by "the man" and "Teacher", and secondly, the corresponding artistic design, complicated in nature, utilizing philosophical images and symbols to serve the content. This is in the first five chapters.

Chapter six is however, the epitome of Armah's reflections. What the author calls his "memories from the past"[37] is made to pass judgement on the disappointing present. The immediate pst of colonialism is responsible for creating some of the present woes. The inferiority of the African during the colonial times, recalled through the inhuman treatment of Kofi Billy in the hands of an Englishman who claimed he deserved his death because he was allegedly playing at work, continues right into the present circumstances. There are reminiscences of "weird European appetites", and the stories of "the huge dogs that ate more meat in a single day than a human, gold coast family got in a month."[38] There are the colonial settlements vis a vis the poverty ridden black areas, and the appetite whetting fruits in European farms that cause the poor, starved black children so much torment as they try to steal them. These of course, are familiar recollections of the colonial era. But Armah's choices in describing some of these episodes is characteristically negative. The whites are the "living ghosts"; their dogs act on their behalf with such despicable terror, under "black dogs" which refers to the category black collaborators or "zombies" who did the "dirty jobs" for their masters.

The most staggering part of the recollection is however, the way Armah recollects through the man, the introduction to "wee", a colloquial for bhang, which it is suggested offered momentary lapses of the victims of such colonial terror. The narrative voice says that this drug is far less dangerous than beer, because it does not bring any headaches after it, and those who have taken it can only pity the rest.[39] Those who take beer can understand what the writer is talking about here. Yet the applause given to a drug generally assumed to be destructive in its effects might be at first, disturbing. On the other hand, it goes a long way in confirming Armah's radical and revolutionary orientation. The narrator continues to argue that the only reason for the "false propaganda" against wee is because it makes the victim, the weakened know the open facts about his life.[40] Whether there is merit in this unusual argument, is an issue difficult to debate here. What is certain, however, is that the so-called advanced nations of the world, have a strange co-relationship between their material abundance and the level of moral degeneracy expressed in such problems as drug abuse. The role of "wee", therefore, as an agent in clearer perception of issues, especially among the underprivileged as in Armah's Ghana, remains an issue for inquiry.

After laying bare the circumstances in which events operate in Ghana, Armah for the first time moots the idea of healing men's souls, a theme given very elaborate treatment in The Healers. The soul is seen as the determinant of peoples attitudes and their consequent actions. The "curse" on the African leadership is lamented directly by Armah as a product of sickened and impoverished souls that need treatment. The historical effect then is that the first generation of would-be liberators simply turned to be proponents of white hegemony for all practical purposes. The middle cadre of lawyers and merchants are described as "their brothers and their friends".[41] Those who became the leaders of Ghana as given in the fiction were ultimately "mastered" in turn from

Europe, leading to the irksome situation Armah satirizes as their feeling of "love, faith and gratitude to their former slavers."[42] The blind imitation of foreigners perpetrated by the leadership is satirized to such proportions as to say that "their clothes were probably fit for the governor's ball or the queen's birthday."[43] What is certain is that this is a revolutionary position for anyone to hold.

Chapter six is thus Armah's longest, and the most significant in its detailing of the various issues. It concludes by Armah's affirmation that "real power can only come from black people"[44], and when this is said there is no doubt that it emerges from the ongoing and sustained criticism of the misguided national performance. It is revolutionary as it is vigorous in its affirmation of Black aesthetics. The theme of white-black relations receives a much thorough treatment in subsequent novels, and quite extensively in Two-Thousand Season. To this we shall appropriately refer and discuss, as being vital to the conceptual scheme of Armah's revolutionary content.

It is imperative to state very clearly what we have thus identified as the novel's contribution to our study of the revolutionary content. First, Achebe, Jones ad Nnolim, may wish to reconsider these lines from the novel:

> Yet out of the decay and the dung there is always a new flowering - perhaps it helps to know that. Perhaps it clears the suffering brain, though down in the heart and within the guts below, the ache and the sinking fear are never soothed. [45] (Emphasis, ours)

It should not be forgotten that our African leadership have often brought a kind of deserved tirade against themselves and that the despair of the conscientious minority is not just a figment of a writer's imagination. The man in his retreat to the cave notes in an assuring way, "is their stifled cry not also life?"[46] (Emphasis, ours).

Secondly, it can be said that the most far reaching revolutionary contribution of this novel is its predictive stance that change involving mere personages is not change at all:

> And after their reign is over, there will be no differences ever. All new men will be like the old. Is that then the whole truth?...[47]

We reiterate that there are no doubts about the correctness of this analysis. It can be advanced further that Armah here is undoubtedly aware of the daily encounter in African politics. His tone is of a completely desperate man, and we submit that this is the material of which a decisive social action is made, contrary to other critical opinion. To quote again from Neil Lazarus:

> There is nothing gratuitous about Armah's presentation in all this. His portrait needs to be as graphic as comprehensive as it is, in order to be disclosive of roots and causes; in order ultimately to be productive of the type of knowledge that must accompany decisive social action. (Emphasis, ours)[48]

And finally, the novel's assessment of the spiritual bankruptcy of man, and the corresponding delving into man's inner thought, was a pace setter in the subsequent attempt to diagnose continental Africa's problems. This is a crucial aspect of change which many African writers have not given sufficient attention. In the next novel, Baako, another of Armah's solo voices, continues with the rebellious and revolutionary quest for change started by "the man" in the first novel.

FRAGMENTS: This novel was first published in America in 1969, there becoming Armah's second novel. It belongs to the same historical setting as the first novel and carries forward Armah's stated scheme of investigating the post independence era in Ghana particularly, and Africa generally. It is about Baako whose departure for the United States is seen as great promise by his family and relatives, only to find him return empty handed, and without any wish to join the rush for wealth and status which have become the new symbols of success. Like "the man" in the former novel, he is a rebel whose clean moral conscience causes his relatives such fury that they work him to madness. Baako ends up in the mad house.

Fragments does not however, limit us to the one character perspective as in the former novel. Armah manages a much more diversified approach by introducing other characters who share in Baako's kind of disillusionment. These include the foreigner, Juana who is practicing psychiatry in Baako's town; Ocran the artist, formerly Baako's teacher, and one artist, turned drunkard, Laurence Boateng. In addition there is a stoical character in Nana, Baako's grandmother, around whom the novel's basic philosophy revolves. The "other side"; the common place mentality is also well represented in the novel by characters whose zeal for money, wealth and the pomp that goes with it, is almost dramatically represented. They include "Henry Robert Hudson Brempong (BSc.)"[49]; Akosua Russell who has turned art and creativity into a money minting vocation, even without creativity itself, and Baako's family hopefuls - his uncle Foli principally; his mother and sister, Araba.

This development in characterization is distinctly remarkable in Armah's growth as an artist and in his general vision of society. Fragments, therefore, represents a movement towards greater realism than encountered in any other of his novels. We do not, therefore, share entirely in Simon Gikandi's view that "society as a real and historical entity, is minimized, sometimes negated entirely..."[50] in Fragments. What he aptly identifies as the "subjective inner"[51] consciousness of the character, does in fact pre-suppose a fairly well articulated real setting.

Baako as the chief protagonist in this novel is yet another anomalous creation. Five years in the United States and all he has is a travelling bag; a guitar and a typewriter. Brempong cannot understand why Baako has not brought back home the cars, suits and all that characterizes a returning "been to".

> "You just have to know what to look for when you get a chance to go abroad. Otherwise you come back empty-handed like a fool, and all the time you spent is a waste, useless...". "You didn't buy anything to travel back with?"
> "Nothing, I was a student."
> "Still..." the shadow of a smile was playing around Brempong's lips..."[52]

It is this shallow and mediocre reasoning of the likes of Brempong that one finds in the unnecessarily eccentric criticism by Charles Nnolim:

> The simple story which Fragments tells is a pathetic one that is replete with a series of ecstasies that end in agonies, triumphs that end in defeats, the ideal frustrated by the real and the actual, high hopes defeated by unfulfilled existence...[53]

This kind of reasoning is tantamount to saying that it is the ideology represented by the Brempongs, in its fancies and relish over grabbed wealth, that should be the informing motif for the good Ghanaian novel. For Ayi Kwei Armah, this cannot be so. His kind of reformers are of a deeper philosophical attribute than can be found in every member of society.

When Baako returns home to Ghana, he encounters the familiar retinue of artificial bottlenecks even in the attempt to get a job. When he finally lands one, it is as "usual": Nothing to be done but payment given. In Baako's case, Ghana-vision spends all the film tapes on covering the head of state's functions. The familiar path for a "typical" civil servant is to have Baako begin on the familiar path toward intellectual deterioration and petty careerism. But he does not take this line, and this is the most important thing about his coception by Armah. Baako has too much of what appears like an artificial faith in people in a country whose notoriety is almost taken for granted. Even taxi drivers overcharge him, as he sits there, trusting in their good faith. Never for once does he advantage himself using the much revered status of a "been to", even if it could pay off and have his sister admitted for emergency treatment. All these incidents give the portrait of a misnomer, if as readers we limit ourselves to the everyday judgement of issues. We see a kind of slow neurosis already beginning, because for all practical purposes, he is mad. Yet the reader must still find it incredible to say that Baako is mad while the rest of the society is normal. Thus, although Baako is adjudged mad, or insane, and thus a case for

the mad house, the question as to who is exactly mad in this society looms persistently.

In his attempt to present the diagnosis for Baako's problem, Armah employs the sociological "cargo cults" identified among Melanesians, to compare with the attitude Ghanaian's have, and expect from the educated. This cargo mentality among natives, is expressed in its lack of philosophic rigor, and the shallowness by which things are perceived. Thus Baako's family sees him as wealth resurrected; a liberator from their previous state of perennial wanting and poverty:

> The member of the family who goes out and comes back home is a sort of charmed man, a miracle worker. He goes, he comes back and with his return some astounding change is expected... It is the myth of the extraordinary man who brings about a complete turnabout in terrible circumstances. We have the old heros who turned defeat into victory for the whole community. But these days, the community has disappeared from the story. Instead there is the family and the hero comes and turns its poverty into sudden wealth.[54]

Cargo mentality is based on such spurious logic; one would even say, primitive logic. In this powerful analysis, Armah identifies himself at once with one of the greatest scourge afflicting the newly educated elite in the continent.

Baako's tragedy is then only part of the general scheme of things as they happen in this society. As a matter of fact, all the positively inclined characters in Fragments share in the trauma of loneliness because nobody can understand them. Juana comes all the way from Puerto Rico to seek solace among the ancestral comrades in Africa but is rudely rebuffed by the experience she finds. Ocran the master artist, is so lonely that he is forced to preach loneliness as a fighting stance: namely, finding your own thing, doing it and not bothering with others. This is purely survivalist strategy and has its own merits because it criticizes those artists who spend much breath (implied in Laurence Boateng) shouting at their less virtuous colleagues, and in so doing, doing nothing themselves. The good artist in Ocran's view,[55] can spend his time wisely and quietly, finishing one work after the other instead of trading words with opportunists like Akosua Russell. But

Armah is also keen to show that Boateng is not entirely wrong. In the drunken stupor, he becomes the vehicle for the criticism of certain disturbing tendencies in African literature; that our artists have no independent organization which can recognize them for what they do. Instead those very ambitious for wealth and fame have learnt to manipulate philanthropic foreign organizations to finance them, irrespective of the quality of their works. This is what Akosua Russell, the one poem "celebrity" does. The way out of a situation such as this would not be merely to envy or quarrel, but as Ocran says, "decide what your art is, and just go ahead with it."[56] This perception by Ocran, cannot again be said to characterize despair for despair's sake. It is an extremely inspiring attitude for the majority of writers who as we know cannot have as much luck with foreign financiers, but must depend entirely on themselves. We argue that this representation of Ocran, is an honest intellectual's interpretation of the artist's vocation, and to this end constitutes a particularly satisfying contention which no amount of foreign money can buy.

One of the most significant issues of "revolutionary content" here in Fragments is, therefore, naturally the artists struggle to "create" in a fundamentally oppressive and intolerant surrounding. As we have seen with Ocran, so it is with Baako. Armah endeavors through Baako, to graphically show what exactly happens during that "creative moment". The artist is a functioning critic of a system of which he is also a member. It is often a battle with deeply felt feelings which Armah renders as a practical state of sickness:

> While he was writing, the fever rose in him again, and he could not feed the sweat oozing out of him, hot and then immediately chilling. The wetness went down all the way to his sole, and his toes when he moved them were slippery against each other. But he could not stop writing till he had caught the fugitive thought and put it down, and then he relaxed thankfully on the bed, surprised to hear himself breathing as if he had been holding in this breath too long..[57] (Emphasis, ours).

What is underlined here, is the artists vocation as a practically torturous moment, especially when your persecutors are also there, as Baako's mother in this case. One page later, this same unquenched urge is described as Baako battles with his thesis on "cargo mentality":

> ... He would gladly have gone to sleep but that sweet slide was once more interrupted by the continuing trail of the idea he had been writing about, and he had to write again...[58]

This virtual strangling by the environment, is what makes the artist such a tortured soul. We have seen how Ocran survives by singular devotion to his work, despite the haunting loneliness. For Baako, the initial enthusiasm to share the gift of his intellect and sensitivity, as he says, through images seen by the larger community, meets a resounding rebuff. The television sets meant for distribution to the villagers are stolen in their tens by corrupt officials right from the head of state. The grabbing of the sets is a scene so emphatically dramatized by Armah that it constitutes our illustration of one of the most important features of style used by this writer, to convey a revolutionary content or message.

The graphic and dramatic creation of the scene includes a satiric use of dialogue and characters to comment on one of the most shocking official corruptions practiced by African governments:

> ...There were lines of cars and official vans waiting out in the drive way, into which several barebacked men were busy piling sets. Off the curb another man stood, a pencil stuck in his hair, taking a small chit from each driver as he came up and shouting a curt order to the porters... Baako watched them, their hypnotic movement absorbing him for a long time, till the last car went off too, and he was suddenly wondering what would happen next.[59]

During this incident, the last two officials engaged in the scramble for sets, underscores in a very "Revolutionary" sense, the battle between "strong hefty men" and "the small men" as it were. The ensuing struggle is optimistic, even in a Marxist sense, not just because none of the two gets the set eventually, but because the "fragmented vision" left

behind is to be "cleared" by a laborer. it is also a deliberate stylistic move, that the "small man" can manage to run faster, beyond the reach of the big man:

> ...But the little man, howling his fear in unashamed relief, was running again, putting a wider distance between his friend and himself, weaving gracefully sideways off the road to let the Director's incoming car pass.[60]

Such telling scenes abound in Fragments. Initially it is the merciless whacking of a helpless dog by one strong man to the delight of a cheering crowd. This wanton malice against an innocent dog occurs in the purview of Juana, and carries the same disturbing weight as the subsequent drama in which Baako is set upon like a "rabid dog", by his uncle, to the cheer of the villagers. The accident at the bridge in which innocent Skido dies is rendered with the same detailed description and memorable impression. What is significant in this incident is the infuriating indifference of the man who calls himself the public works Engineer, even in situations that cost human life and yet could be so easy to rectify.

The material worship that marks the so-called out dooring ceremony for Araba's child, is as emphatically rendered as the pomp and pageantry that surrounded Brempong's return from abroad, juxtaposed with Baako's quiet exit from the airport.[61] The out-dooring ceremony is given such satiric description:

> This was a rich crowd of guests, too, sitting at first like a picture already taken, woollen suits flashing shoes, important crossed legs, bright rings held in front of restful bellies, an authentic cold-climate over-coat form Europe or America held traveller-fashion over an arm, five or six waist coats, silken ties and silver clasps, and a magnificent sane man in a university gown reigning over four admiring women..., a great rich splendor stifling all these people in the warmth of a beautiful day...[62]

Such vividly memorable scenes, and their stylistic effect in the appreciation of Armah's works would require a separate study. Suffice it to conclude the illustrations, by using Nana's apt reference to this new "madness", as "the new god they have found."[63]

In the characterization of Nana, Armah's works acquire an increasing intensity in terms of "Africanist" solutions.

In Fragments it is Nana, the grandmother who provides the philosophic premise for African ways. She contributes an unequivocal "prophetic vision" and hope and, therefore, the fact that negative critics like Nnolim[64] do not make any references to this, is a major shortcoming of their criticism. Nana has an "ameliorating" perception of both past and present that makes the novel rise beyond the hopelessness of the reality.

Her vision is specifically constituted in her rejection of the commercialization of a new born child because it negates the principles of affirming life which the custom of outdooring initially vied for. In the beginning she opts for silence because her eyes see what others cannot see, a philosophic truism indeed. She begins and closes the novel with equal optimism; with solemnity and prayer. It is first her undaunted optimism about Baako's return, even when all the others have given up; in the end it is her faith, that "not everything is lost."[65] The return to the ancestors is the start of life in its deeper philosophic meaning, from time immemorial.

The importance of Nana's character also lies in her parting reprimand of the excesses of the present, "the haste to consume things we have taken no care or trouble to produce."[66] Coming from her, it is evidence of great social awareness and we appreciate that whether modern or traditional, consumption without production is immoral and unjust. It is infact Nana's faith in the future that leads her to pray for Baako so that, "If my strength is not enough, I will seek out stronger spirits and speak to their souls of his need for them".[67]

In Fragments, we can authoritatively summarize then, that it has a revolutionary content. This consists, first in the artistic clarity of the work which we analyzed as being more realistic than the first novel; secondly, the continued exploration of "regenerative

values" through the struggle of positive, artist like characters such as Ocran and Baako; and finally, the vision advanced that commits itself to some very good traditional African values that are being lost in the whirlpool of foreign influences. We have also tried to show how the artistic strategy for this message is in itself "revolutionary"; especially in its vivid and memorable descriptions.

Armah's commitment to Africa is an important undertaking in the next three novels. In the next analysis we focus on how his third novel details the history and consequence of wrong foreign values that have continued to seriously affect the positive progress of our continent.

Why Are We So Blest? This novel is structured in a unique form, with chapters corresponding to extracts from the diaries of its three main characters: Solo, Modin and Aimee. For this reason, it is the one Armah novel which operates at the subjective level of consciousness than any other. It is the one in which the particularity of setting and reality are relegated in favor of the subjective, inner minds and not in Fragments, as Gikandi suggests.[68]

Why Are We So Blest? has one of the most uniquely contrived plots one has come across, owing mainly to its diary form. It moves from the personal recollections of Modin who we realize, only at the end of the novel, to be dead long before the story starts; to the reflections by Solo who is mainly concerned about his personal disappointments in the effort to be a "revolutionary". Modin's diary has got to Solo through Aimee Reischt, his former white girlfriend who accompanied him (Modin) to Africa in search of a practical revolutionary experience. Solo is, therefore, a narrator and commentator on the tragic life of these two "strange" lovers, who we are told have left the luxury of the United States of America, to come and make a "revolutionary" contribution to the various struggles by the

people in Africa. Modin has opted out of a generous doctoral scholarship at the prestigious Harvard University, after falling apart with the whites, and feeling extremely disillusioned about the strategy used since historical times, to create a black middle class, enjoying privileges at the expense of the black majority, back at home.

Why Are We So Blest? is a highly analytical piece and quite admittedly, a major departure from the conventional novel. If our comments on Armah upto this chapter are anything to go by, critics should not find the novel's style any stranger.

The title of this novel reminds one of the first novel, by the fact of its attention drawing length, and the inquiring prose, Why...? This we suggest has to do with the demands of the content chosen. The title for instance presumes a careful inquiry to be following: It imposes on the readers a demand for pondering the issues, right from the start. "Blest" means, "to extol as holy; to invoke divine favor upon; to make joyous, happy or prosperous."[69] But the word also means, "to wound or beat"[70] and although this latter usage is less frequent, it becomes obvious that Armah intends these two meanings to be associated in the analysis of the novel.

White America is clearly at the height of great esteem and material prosperity; it is indeed "blest", and the White Americans are over-zealous about it as we see from the enthusiasm of the White student who draws Modin's attention to the article from which the title derives. Ayn Rand (the magazine editor), chooses to extol this aspect of America, un-aware that there are people like Modin who have been completely disillusioned by this material progress and are even ready to leave America. The irony of the situation is that the editor is himself of Asian origin and knows, or should know how the minority races have suffered in America despite this much lauded prosperity. That America is great even in the material sense, is readily proven by the fact so lavishly quoted:

> The myth of Paradise finds its full meaning here, in the New World. Paradise is a state of grace, and grace is space - the distance that separates the holy from the merely human, the sacred from the profane, separates and

> protects: ...that distance that marks off the pedigreed race horse from laboring hybrids - that distance is grace. And that is the distance between the American commonwealth and the remnant of the world. It is the measure of our blessedness.[71] (Emphasis, ours)

This astute arrogance over materiality albeit by a co-opted citizen whose roots are in "the remnant of the world", is as infuriating as it is tragic to the reader, the writer, and in the context, Modin. What Armah brings out very clearly is also, that this editor is ignorant of the totality of America: The America of racial apartheid and oppression of the inferior races like "the mass murder of the Indians". We are persuaded to agree with Modin that the author of such an article is "a street corner hustler, nothing better."[72]

It is the racial relations between Black America and White America; Black Africa and White Euro-America, that forms the central theme in Why Are We So Blest? In this novel, unlike any other, Ayi Kwei Armah employs the unusual imagery of sexual love, or sexual relations, to dramatize a profoundly ironic situation in which the best expression of human love becomes the best expression of human hate. This usage of imagery has, to Armah's credit, what we see as the "metaphysical greatness" once seen in the early European poetry, (without saying that Armah borrows from them). The inspiring crux of metaphysical greatness is "the seeing of likeness in the most unlikely things, and basing its central comparison on the most discordant images."[73]

The resultant meaning of the love between Aimee and Modin is, therefore, hate. She uses him to obtain sexual satisfaction which has been impossible in her relationship with her fellow whites. Her frigidity as a woman can only abate when she fantasizes scenes where the man is an African. What Armah is dealing with here is nothing new in Euro/White-African relations, as seen in various literature by Black Americans. The white women in their numbers look upto Black men for sexual satisfaction because the racist society has created all sorts of incredible myths about the potence of the Black man. Aimee's condition is, therefore, used to score dividends with white America. the actual

pain that is required to get her anywhere sexually is a tragic statement on the social horror of a Nation that describes itself as "paradise". In the same predicament is Mrs. Jefferson; Mrs oppenhardt whose husband would rather immerse himself in the official duties than have any time for his wife. There is Carol, and several other un-named characters. Modin finally discovers it all:

> I...laughed when American women begged to be taken from their husbands... I asked them where they wanted to be taken. it was not places they wanted to reach, not places in space but situations conditions, states of feeling and of mind in all of which disaster lay barely hidden under light headed surfaces. I was another rare creature, an African vehicle to help them reach the strange destinations of their souls...[74]

Armah's horror at this "white aesthetics" is so great that the behavior of these women is made to reach manic, inhuman proportions. Aimee's diary recounts her visit to an African country much earlier, and if there is anything she ever comments about, it is her insatiable desire to sleep with all the important people, including the head of state! It is an incredible account of what Armah conceives as not just being probable, but highly possible. But this sexual mania should not be seen just as the writer's relish for banal or crude aspects of human life. Only a poor reading would come to such a conclusion. It is the metaphorical meaning behind Aimee's sexual animosity that is important. it is the figurative "unfeelingness" of white America; they are as it were insatiable in every sense of the word.

From Modin's life, we can then discern what Armah presents with a scientific sense of detail as the quagmire of the "evolue" African who is being unwittingly trained to service the cause of American imperialism and capitalist interests. What takes place is that an African is first offered a scholarship in an American or any other European University. it is the first step of a protracted design to alienate one from his country and his people. In the west, he is plunged into the realm of the so called advanced world where he soon realizes that he is extremely lonely. Armah graphically presents this loneliness as being

so horrendous that the victims realize that the loneliness so imposed on him is used to make him strike an inevitable friendship with the whites; to make him both an emotional and material dependant. It is this that explains the crazy, destructive indulgence that Modin finds himself in: "..What I wanted to flee was the loneliness, and she helped me to do that..."[75] This psyche-morality for the growing indulgence amounts, according to this "study" to an unwitting suicide. It proves, in the first place, impossible to shake Aimee off, because the victim (Modin), argues, " its temptation looked like extreme pleasure, offered, taken, tasted."[76]

The conclusion that Modin reaches is an expected logical outcome of the plight of the black man caught up in the exigencies of the west:

> Those things I thought I was doing freely out of my own desire, they are also part of the larger scheme that aims at our destruction. My friendships here have been different invitations to different kinds of death, calls to a spiritual disintegration Africa has suffered since how many centuries?[77]

What is remarkable here is Armah's exploration of Modin's situation as to find that this force that ultimately destroys the black man is initially within the victim himself, especially in the desire to ape the west. But even after learning of the destructive potential of the west, the victim is so tempted that he refuses to withdraw in time. It, therefore, takes an actual wounding by Jefferson for Modin to realize that his involvement with the west, initially paraded as founded on love, is indeed founded on hate. This is the metaphorical meaning of the stabbing of Modin by Jefferson, ironically when the former is fulfilling his "duty" of satisfying the western nymphomaniac, Mrs Jefferson. But the more tragic rendition of the hostile potential of this involvement is in the brutal murder of Modin at the end of the novel when he is with Aimee. Armah dramatizes this scene in the novel in a manner and in a language that is admittedly crude, almost unprintable. What he achieves is to more than aptly demonstrate the lethal potential in a love in which partners merely use each other as instruments. Thus, although this style is almost mind

boggling to the reader who makes puritanical claims, we find that a writer faced with a situation like this has no choice. What Armah is doing is to outmatch western decadence, by using decadence itself; perhaps the only language its practitioners can understand. This again, it is emphasized is a highly revolutionary artistic strategy.

Solo on the other hand, represents the other side of Modin. Their experiences as "evolues" are similar upto a certain point, beyond which we find that Solo becomes, as we observed earlier, the critic and commentator on Modin's life. In his own experiences, he has had the chance to attempt to befriend a white girl, Silvia, way back in Portugal. Despite his deeply felt love for the girl, it was ultimately his color that led to his rejection by Silvia. Later as he carries the commentary on Modin's life, we feel he has the capacity to conclude thus:

> Love. A fusion, a confusion of the self with another self. With terrifying different, other selves, a terrifying case of love. A loss of identity. The beginning of wild erring journeys for the soul dissolved. How indeed except through confusion, could that African soul love an American...[78]

In our revolutionary perspective, this insight of Solo is informing particularly because it projects the authorial mind quite distinctly. There is infact, little doubt, that Solo is Armah's most biographical re-production. The point of view aside, the detailed experiences of sickness and mental breakdown are unavoidably reminiscent of Armah's own experiences, during which he suffered these conditions.[79]

"What is ordained for us, I have not escaped," says Solo..."the fate of the evolue, the turning of the assimilated African not into something creating its own life, but into a eater of crumbs in the house of slavery"...[80]

Ultimately, the "evolue" is the "...tiny creature of Europe's small minded slavers, imitators of their huge-bodied American kin".[81] Modin's pattern of life which Solo comments on is, therefore, true for all cases of the evolue who persist in their involvement with whites. What happens is that an African on scholarship, as we stated with Modin, is

unwittingly being trained to join the upper, white classes and to increasingly detest his own lot. This is what initially leads Modin to detest this long term strategy:

> ...first, the security thing. The degree puts me in the elite. Guaranteed income, perks, the whole rotten deal I tell myself I don't want..."[82]

His disillusionment and despair is compounded by the realization that even the lectures are infused with a racist superiority complex:

> I should have stopped going to lectures long ago. they all form part of a ritual celebrating a tradition called great because it is European, western, white. The triumphant assumption of a superior community underlies them all, an assumption designed to reduce us to invisibility while magnifying whiteness...[83]

The revolutionary experience in the fictional Cangheria is, therefore, the epitome of the disillusioned's quest for alternative life. To the extent that Solo and Modin opt for this revolutionary practice in Africa, there is a similarity in their character intended by Armah. But to the extent that they conceive of it differently, Armah manages to present the various perspectives encountered among so called revolutionaries. This insight we argue is important for the writer, because it is through it that we realize the intricacies of a task of this magnitude, or to use Armah's own reference; the distinction between real revolutionaries and phonies.[84]

Part of Solo's credibility as an authorial vehicle is the simultaneous capacity for self criticism. He does not idealize about the revolutionary task:

> Here we are trapped in idiocy. We persuade ourselves we have too much intelligence for the work we do, but we lack the world pervading toughness to take hold of our own intelligence, use it against others to create small heavens for ourselves at their expense. Instead we float between pain that speaks only in our private nights and the mute resentment of long hopeless days.[85]

It is the theoretical zeal as opposed to actual practice as well as the personal survival instincts of the leadership of Jorge Manuel and Estabian Ngulo that is highlighted and criticized through these observations. Armah describes them through Solo, as the case

of "...a people who want to live..."[86]

When Modin leaves the U.S.A., he has convinced himself just like Solo that the only thing worth living for is "a revolutionary commitment to Africa." However, the "fire" they expected to find is not there. From Solo's independent comments, we know that the leadership of the revolutionaries is fraught with problems. Jorge Manuel has his own racial hang-ups which he uses to privilege himself; Esteban Ngulo has the accusing eyes of him who believes that despite University education, he is still the better. Armah writes:

> ...But how long would it have been possible not to see that the lighter brother drank spirits upstairs with suave travellers while down below the black one licked the tasteless backs of stamps... Here, too, was a division that would exist even when the last of the Portuguese had left Cangheria, the ambiguous freedom of Estaben Ngulo to serve while Jorge Manuel consumed the credit and the sweetness...[87]

For Modin, the tragic problem is that nobody can trust his intentions because he has teamed up with a white woman. Indeed Aimee's misguided notions about a revolution - (she talks of a revolutionary hotel; money is bourgeois e.t.c.) are a sad comment on the purely theoretical nature of many so called revolutionaries. For this white girl who is so vocal about revolution, we realize she is out for adventure, pure and simple. Solo remarks with exactness:

> She had moved as if control were something alien to her nature, and her behavior, her words and her gestures as she talked, all gave a strong impression of a destructive wildness, lack of self control...[88]

What we are saying in earnest is then that, Ayi Kwei Armah has not given a frivolous, idealistic treatment to the ideas of revolution advanced in his novel. This, to us, is one of the most important contributions to the understanding of the growth of the revolutionary vision in the writer's works.

Solo like Baako and man before him is, therefore, more than just an expression of despair. It is true that he moves from great despair to near disillusionment in it s totality, yet it must be emphasized that he is still part of an experience that is still felt in Africa.

His state of indecision is necessary because it presents truthfully the state of ideological confusion that has afflicted not just Armah, but many serious thinkers. In his earlier encounter with the one legged man at the hospital, the substantial question of, "who gained" from the earlier revolution, remains the novels most important issue raised. The symbolism of one leg is at once a reminder of the revolution's destructive capacity, as well as the enormity of the problem of fighting for freedom. This for Armah is the revolution's essence. The single most important truth in the novel emerges as a result of this encounter with the veteran of the revolution, summarizing the essence of revolutionary commitment:

> Those who offer themselves up to be killed to be maimed and driven insane, those who go beyond what is even possible for other human beings in the pursuit of the revolution, they are its essence..."[89]

The experience is that the people who gain power in Africa have often been the flukes who never gave themselves this far. Armah distinguishes the "militants", who must catalyze the revolution and "push forward something heavier, far more gross than itself".[90] Hence the truck Solo draws, represents society:

> ...any society, heavy with the corrupt ones, the opportunitists, the drugged, the old, the young, everybody, in it. And then there are the militants pushing the whole massive thing from the lower to the higher level. But they themselves are destroyed in the process..."[91]

But if Solo's future lies in finding an answer for his tired spirit; what he philosophically calls, "something both beautiful and true",[92] then we must turn to Armah's answers in The Healers. This novel in its attempt to absolve the dominating problem of despair by advocating a tenable spiritual approach, forms our conclusion to this survey on Armah's growth as a revolutionary writer.

THE HEALERS: This novel was published in 1978, and is Armah's latest novel. In a nutshell, it is a novel about one of the great West African Empires, Ashanti, which fell to

is clearly more interested in the outcome of the wars, and especially the defeats and mass deaths of the many black soldiers, who so perished because of the many fatal errors by the royals. What happens is that, very early in the novel, Armah invokes an act of realism, almost in the conventional Engels sense, but so exploded in its use of the traditional narrative form, that we gradually realize it is for a higher artistic truth than just for its own sake:

> Let the listener know when... Let the listener know where. then Anowa tongue born for eloquence, keep faith with the minds remembrance, lest the tellers forgetfulness spoil the listeners joy...[94]

We intend a detailed assessment of this "traditional mode of narrative" in respect of Two Thousand Seasons. What we can however, say about the historicity of the novel, is that real historical personalities have been named to enhance the authenticity. There was the well known Osei Tutu; Obiri Yeboa; Okomfo Anokye and others in the historical founding of the Ashanti Empire. The war lords mentioned on either side, Asamoa Nkwanta and the white commander, Glover, were actual personages, Nkwanta said to have had no equal during his time. The folly and bicker between kindred states as between the Ashanti and the Fante, resulting in the easy victory of the Europeans over the disunited African groups, are part of this historical reference.

But perhaps that is as far as one can go. Beyond that, The Healers, is a truly healing book, borrowing its profound philosophical basis from this ancient art known to all African communities. But as is always the case with Armah, "healing" as an African practice is not just lauded because it is African: Everything earns praise or condemnation on its own merit. Thus, "quacks" who cash on peoples miseries and yearning for cure are so sarcastically condemned:

> ...They stuffed her stomach with scrapings from the backs of innumerable trees. They fed her scratching from snakes, rhinos, lizards, spiders and scorpions, a most impressive array of beasts. Each doctor promised with his concoctions to give Araba Jesiwa the key that would unlock her love gift and open her to fruitful life..."[95] (With our emphasis)

This is a testimony of knowledge of the African traditional healing methods, but also its critique.

The Healers, is unlike the rest of Armah's novels in one major way: While all the rest loom with a certain amount of desperate cry, this novel has an amazing serenity about it; an affirmation of greater faith in the human spirit than one can think of in any other of our literatures. In fact, we are completely not aware of any other African writer who is treating continental problems from this unusual perspective of calling for a spiritual healing among the people. In this respect alone, it is our contention that Armah does make a revolutionary contribution to our literature both in terms of finding solutions, as at the aesthetic level of fulfillment.

The opening of The Healers is serenely dramatic in a manner whose circumstances remind one of the great Russian novel, Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The two novels share one particular significant element, namely, the humanism of the spirit which elevates spiritual perfection while completely repulsed by materiality or bodily physique of themselves as yardsticks for the measurement of human value.

The use of language is striking from the outset; for instance, the hyperbole that, "the killing was done in a particular, bloody, brutal say."[96] Armah continues in a clearly partisan language, that those who saw the victims body agreed on the fact that the murderer acted, "from a fierce passionate motive, the kind of violent motive springing out of jealousy made hotter by pure, vindicate hate..."[97] This language underscores the violent senselessness of the act which as readers we are invited to condemn. The repeated syllables are a deliberate stylisation to achieve emphasis so that the artist's stand against such wanton murder becomes unequivocal. To do this even more effectively, Armah submerges himself into the role of an expert traditional story teller so well known among

his communities, and thus invokes the help of ancestors:

> ...Ah Fasseke, words fail the story teller... send me eloquence to finish what I have began... send me words Mokopu Mofolo...[98]

The effect is a clear Partisanship which enables the author to condemn what he dislikes. In the novel then, the side of the manipulators is painted with deliberate destructive qualities: recklessness, violence, blood-thirst and the like. The "Healers" on the other hand are endowed with richly inspiring qualities. They are calm, serene people who rise above the common place mediocrity of the manipulators. What was unresolved in Why Are We So Blest? by way of Solo's search for what is at the same time "true and beautiful", can be said to have been adequately realized in Appia the immaculate prince, Densu, Damfo, Araba Jesiwa and the entire lot of the "healers". Appia and Densu in their participation in the games, operate like angels. Witness their running style:

> In each race Densu followed Appia closely, in second place. His running also had power in it, but there was nothing at all explosive here. For more than power, Densu's running had a grace: a natural unhurried smoothness that was a pleasure merely to look at...[99]

What is particularly important about the characterization of the inspiring healers in this novel, is the correlation Armah created and found to exist between physique, character and behaviors. Appia, Densu and Jesiwa are characters of tremendous beauty. Armah writes of Jesiwa, "She should have been one of those women born to be fortunes favorites. Nature had given her body beauty.. She should have been fortunate from birth."[100] The characters of the healers are remarkably pleasant; beaming with patience, tolerance and goodness. They are as beautiful, handsome as they are just. But above all, they are exceedingly witty and intelligent. Similarly, physical ugliness underlies violence manipulation, brutality, injustice, daftness and all the undesirable negative traits that inform the characters of Ababio and Buntui. Thus Buntui is "...a hugh body and such a

tiny brain to control it".[101] And Ababio observes, "sometimes that defect makes a person a valuable ally... all the powerful body needs is a friendly brain willing to command it. Can you think of a better servant? A perfect servant."[102]

The theme of manipulation for power is crucial in this analysis because it is the writers mode of commenting on the present using a traditional experience. It is a revelation of how the wrong people get power within the African political experience, using crude means, and yet have the knack to claim their own popularity. Ababio's rise to power in the novel is as revolting as it is unjustly manipulated to the extent of eliminating so brutally, the rightful heir. It makes the important point that to know somebody's political ambition is tantamount to hanging oneself. This is the plight Densu finds himself in, because as Ababio puts it, "a man who offers you his secrets puts a knife in your hand and bares his neck to you. He is offering you a choice. Friendship until death or enmity...[103] Consequently, Densu must protect him through the forced joint partnership, or he is to be "destroyed", Armah's familiar metaphor for such wanton acts as human murder. Ababio in the novel then spells the machiavellian philosophy in which human beings are merely objects of political expediency:

> A human being was to him nothing better than an obstacle to be tricked, lied to, manipulated and shaped by force or guile into becoming a useable ally inspite of himself. And if that failed, then a human being became simply an object to be destroyed.[104]

The elegant prince Appia, therefore, dies very early in the novel as a result of Ababio's calculations, yet true to practice, his murderer, thriving on deceit, pretence and lies, rises to become the new king. Appia's death is however, important from the point of view of the plot's design, because being the most perfect human being in the fictional Empire, he is the sacrifice; he provides in his death, the moral justification for the healing mission. In addition, his close associate; age-mate and friend, Densu, becomes the principal investigator of this foul death, and in so doing resolving the riddle of the unprecedented

destruction. This also facilitates the process of the quest for justice which the writer would like to achieve.

It is important noting once again that it is not the credibility value or its historical accuracy that would put this novel to test. Rather, the historical exaggerations and the peculiar mode of characterization, must be understood to have been done to serve a higher artistic purpose. We find for instance, that Armah's attitude towards the traditional games is deliberately made up to show in fact, that even traditional societies changed both in form and content over time; a distinction that is important for him in dispelling the notion that African societies have some inherent cohesiveness only eliminated by colonial contact. In the games so substantially described in part 1 of the novel two developments take place:

> ...The way the people who still remembered talked of them, these had been festivals made for keeping a people together. They were not so much celebrations as invocations of wholeness...[105]

This is to be distinguished from the present abuse and misuse by people and their rulers, within the same traditional setting:

> ...The games were now trials of individual strength and skill. At the end, a single person would be chosen victor and isolated for the admiration of spectators and the envy of defeated competitors.[106]

This in effect becomes the breeding ground for envy, rivalry and the whole set of squabbles that later assail the Ashanti empire, leaving it completely exposed for the new colonial manipulation. The development of The Healers plot then depends on Densu's disenchantment with this new arrangement, forcing his tired spirit, to seek the less turbulent approach of the healers.

Before we elaborate on this particularly inspiring "healing" approach, it is pertinent to explain that this vocation as expounded by Armah in the novel must not be taken too literally. It has a certain metaphorical conception derived from a correct scientific appraisal of the human heart, or spirit as it were. The mind as the most important control

mechanism in situations of emotional instability or stress - the kind that afflicts Densu in this novel, or Solo in Why Are We So Blest? is basic to psychology, and the related discipline, psychiatry:

> Psychiatry comprises the recognition, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness of which the principal manifestations are mental. Some of these disorders are apparently of psychological origin; while in others there may be some more or less obvious physical cause, the symptoms are, again, predominantly mental.[107]

It is precisely the recognition of the scientific merit in the argument for "healing", that leads the writer to paint the healers as a special category of people, who have mastered self and mind control. From his earlier tutelage under Araba Jesiwa, Densu recalls:

> They were memories of the search for a true self; the attempt to let the true self reveal its nature and follow its own path in life, the avoidance of force, deception and manipulation in relationships with close ones, the constant reliance on inspiration to the work of this spirit...[108]

Damfo who is the model of all this, has also asserted that in this vocation, they must set great value in "seeing truly, hearing truly, understanding truly and acting truly;"[109] an invocation as it were of the moral conscience in doing what is best and rational in a given moment of choice.

The most important tenet of "healing" according to its master philosopher is accordingly seen as the appeal for unity which is seen as creative, as opposed to the more destructive force of division. As a result the healing of individual persons is not the main vocation according to Damfo, but just part of it. We realize then that Armah gives healing a revolutionary dimension (precisely in equating it to unity), but of course deriving the concept from the ancient practice of the art, and then exploding it to serve a political message in his fiction. In all this remarkable stylization, it is harped that the collective interest has the pre-eminence:

> Tribes and Nations are just signs that the whole is diseased. The healing work that cures a whole people is the highest work, far higher than the cure of single individuals.[110]

This philosophy set against the background of African history in general and Ashanti in particular, annoys Armah because our people failed to see this essential unity and instead harped on their differences: The Denchira; the Akim; The Wassa; the Swehi; the Aowin; the Nzema; the Ekua peru: "all these were scattered pieces of what once came together", observes Armah. this undesirable misfortune as the novelist refers to it, was capitalized on by the British colonizers, till the people themselves were deluded into believing that these divisions were part of their natural state.

Healing then, according to Armah has non-literal, if one likes, political overtones as we have suggested. It is a deliberately prolonged endeavour, demanding untold patience from those who opt for it like Densu. This is necessary, in order to distinguish it from the hurried, reckless scheming of the manipulators, and generally the various abhorrences of the secular world. In introducing Densu to these demands, Damfo takes a staggering seven days, just to mention one rule for each day. The idea is to show, from the experience of one erstwhile healer, Esuman, what Armah surmises as the "frailty of generous decisions.[111] What Esuman did, was to make a quick decision to become a healer, thinking it to be a simple task and generous rewards... He expected rewards from the world. Fame, wealth, power. We don't have those things here. So Esuman had to leave."[112]

The first thing, therefore, is for the would be healer to be prepared to leave the pomp and glory of the world, a tellingly difficult choice:

> There's comfort. Wealth. There's also love, the respect of close ones. Even fame, the respect of distant people, power among men. The satisfaction of being known wherever you go. These are things that sweeten life for men. The healer turns his back on all of them...[113]

Other rules are on the surface of it, simple: Abstention from smoke and alcoholic

drinks, yet it needs no connoisseur of cigarettes to know the tremendous difficulty involved in this demand. It is not so much the issues of health here that are being raised. What Armah means is that a healer's example ought to be exemplary; if need be a healer should be a sober man. Healers, also, must not practice violence, but as typical in Armah's philosophy, this is not a panacea for inaction, docility or passive naivete; Densu answers to Damfo's satisfaction:

> "How can you kill for respect of life?"
> "If what I kill destroys life."[114]

When Damfo proceeds to instruct that a healer must not call upon his God to destroy anyone, Armah is not merely being an African believer in fetish personal gods. His message is important here in the sense that for this writer, all that is good and just is in fact what constitutes a God, and the faith that goes with it.

The rule of non-association with the royals is a critique on lobbying for power, "to catch the droppings from the powerful."[115] The rule on no gossiping and no quarrelling, is on the other hand, an antidote for the familiar, cheap political bickering and propaganda designed by ambitious power seekers for their personal gain. The last rule in which the healer is not supposed to waste the night, can be seen as a lesson in good health and strategic planning. Sufficient sleep is necessary for a person in a position of responsibility and leadership as much as it is necessary to work out meaningful plans for the future. While such a rule is on the surface a simplistic one, what is of consequence is that many leaders in Africa are too over-preoccupied with worries of security and wealth, to the extent that they hardly have what Armah sees as a good rest, or a good sleep. The argument according to this way of thinking is that a good rest entailed in a peaceful sleep is necessary for productive work in the following day.

Other demands on the healers such as the respect for age, are in short, our writers salutation to this age-old African practice, from which his novel derives its inspiration.

In discussing Armah's philosophy of healing, and having considered at length the peculiarities of language, characters and themes of power politics, we have endeavoured to show the areas in which The Healers continue to subscribe to the notion of revolutionary content. Armah's experimentation with language, his heavy reliance on traditional African modes and concepts have been shown to be part and parcel of a revolutionary quest. We shall explore further this aspect of Armah's writings in the next chapter.

In concluding our analysis of The Healers, a comment is necessary on what Armah presents as "the new dance", with which the novel ends. The real criminals at this point have got to the day of reckoning, as it were. Buntui is the most pitiable because he is hanged by representatives of the very power he has so loyally served. Ababio is set for a trial which he cannot win, and although his death is the logical expectation, as a character his knack for political manipulation is one of the best representations of this "type" of personality in our African politics. The five lords of the healing mission; Damfo, Araba Jesiwa, Densu, Ajoa and Ama Nkroma, are thus left in a conceptual method in which they witness "the new dance". This new dance is however, not a statement of resolution to the old and new forces that have battled in the novel, but rather, Armah intends it as a diagnosis of the new problem to which the healers work will turn in the future. It can be argued that the entirety of the healing mission as we have discussed it is part of Armah's philosophical approach to the larger problem encountered in African politics, and especially in its relations with the west.

In the era of "the new dance", it is important that Araba Jesiwa begins by forbidding escapist rituals such as the killing of a lamb, which she correctly argues, cannot itself, "clean the dirty soul of men."[116] This of course, is part of the rejection of what the writer earlier on sees as, "cruel, devious customs", which have often been used to

perpetuate tyranny against innocent victims, such as we see in the "sacrificial deaths" in which the slaves are killed supposedly to atone for the sins of the nation and the people.

In the dance, Armah is disturbed by the chord struck between foreigners and black people, in which there is a "...strangely, happy inter-weaving of rhythms, and instead of the soldiers marching back through the streets, the soldiers danced".[117] The five healers standing by, see it as an accidental unity of the various black factions who have, in coming to say goodbye to their former masters, been brought together into a dance initiated by the significantly choiced group - the west Indians. It is possible to see here Armah's reliance on the common history of colonialism as a basis for unity of both Africans and west Indians. What is more important is his wish that such unity is the ideal, instead of letting the divisions created by the white man continue in Africa. This kind of programme is the work the healers moot for themselves as they watch the dance. It is the strategy of a united Africa, based on a rejection of the colonialist and an implied neo-colonialist strategy, of divide and rule.

In our next chapter, we shall attest to the most vociferous cry against white Europe in a novel we believe has no African equal both in content and in the aesthetic rendition of this content. This is, Two Thousand Seasons, Armah's fourth novel in order of appearance, in which we argue he exemplified the apex of this revolutionary quest for alternatives.

CHAPTER 3

ART AND REVOLUTIONARY CONTENT IN "TWO THOUSAND SEASONS".

Two Thousand Seasons is a novel about the entirety of African history in the face of significant historical changes that move us from ancient Africa, through colonialism up to the present. It takes as its departure point a collective narrative perspective in which continental Africa's aspirations are narrated through a "we" voice. One of the most difficult problems a critic of this novel faces is one of describing the plot, because true to a common Armah style, no plot in the conventional sense exists. Other than in The Healers where some veritable attempt is made to write a realistic novel, the rest of Armah's novels as we have indicated in the preceding chapters, do not seem to have a simple chronological plot to be easily surmised. The intricacies of plot development and characterization are a feature that continues right into the novel to be studied in this chapter. Two Thousand Seasons like its predecessors that we have discussed, is in short, a novel of issues, and this fact ought to be clearly understood by those who venture to respond to it. Its important issue or concern in this respect is, as we have stated, the African historical experience, dating from the mythical past right upto the present.

In an ambitious fictional race, Armah attempts to scan and fictionalize some two thousand years of an experience. Such a task would not be without its limitations, yet we still fully share in Emmanuel Ngara's conclusive remarks in his linguistic assessment of this work:

> ...There is nothing so far written in African fiction to surpass its excellence of language, its epic splendor, its intense moral earnestness. It is a novel which deserves the attention of all African readers.[1]

The main narrative track for the novel is based on the rebellion by a young group of initiates (simply referred to as "we"), who having been tricked into slavery by their own king, manage to escape and organize themselves into a kind of guerilla group that wage

war against their "white destroyers" (as Armah calls them), and their African agents till some kind of victory is recorded. It becomes a complicated war of liberation in which Armah raises an almost original kind of political ideology, called "the way", and fuses this with a carefully presented "guerilla war" experience to demonstrate his perception of liberation in Africa.

This, admittedly ambitious task, appears to have dictated an equally ambitious form from the novelist which many critics have found baffling. As an "issue" novel, Two Thousand Seasons is structured and executed as an uncompromisingly anti-white-European color, expressed in whatever form. The author considers it as an African novel and goes to great lengths as we shall see to even attempt to decolonize the English mannerism of language, in expressing his African content. We thus fully agree with Wole Soyinka's assessment of the novel, (despite his perturbed conscience with "the actual language of confrontation and the dramatic devices in which the victims of the author's ire are trapped.[2]) Soyinka writes:

> ...In spite of this, Two Thousand Seasons is not a racist tract; the central theme is far too positive and dedicated and its ferocious onslaught on alien contamination soon falls into place as a preparatory exercise for the liberation of the mind...[3]

Indeed, one of the most remarkable things about the criticism of Two Thousand Seasons is that even its most negative critics, are simply awed by its strengths. Imme Ikiddeh, therefore, writes that "Two Thousand Seasons is rendered totally useless as a socially meaningful work of art by the fact that the foundations of the social conflict are not realistically established."[4] He further charges that "the way" is vague or merely known by "its negative characteristics"[5] (a view shared by Wole Soyinka[6]). Yet like Soyinka, Ikiddeh's subsequent analysis of the text soon renders null and void these charges. Hugh Webb considers the novel as "...The most achieved work (in the sense of a total unified form) within the corpus of Anglo-phone African literature"[7] but infers some kind of racist

stance on the part of Ayi Kwei Armah. It is however, Bernth Lindfors the White-American critic of African Literature who pinpoints the general westerner's discomforts with this novel. Writers Lindfors:

> This is a philosophy of paranoia, an anti-racist racism - in short, negritude reborn... In place of a usable historical myth, Two Thousand Seasons overschematizes the past, creating the dangerous kind of lie that Frantz Fanon used to call mystification...[8] (Emphasis, ours)

Again Lindfors has no choice: He ends up, after this tirade, describing the novel so appropriately, as "a visionary myth"[9]

Perhaps the most positive criticism of Ayi Kwei Armah to date is in the much awaited book by Robert Fraser.[10] Fraser tries to fill a yawning gap when he appropriately notes that the writers reputation, "has been clouded by misunderstanding and a kind of critical irrelevance that have denied him the recognition his originality would seem to demand."[11] The study is however, marred by its failure to say exactly what the author identifies as "the sheer forces of his (Armah's) talent."[12]

In this study, three areas of the novel are closely analyzed, to exemplify beyond doubt, our continuing case for the art and revolutionary content of this writer's novels. These include: The indomitable ideology of, "the way"; the treatise on guerilla warfare as the most tenable military strategy for freedom seekers, and lastly, the artistic irreproachability of the work.

Our contention is that "the way" as so elaborately belabored by Armah is indeed an attempt to describe a practical way of life in its totality. "The way", in this novel, is by no means vague as suggested by Soyinka and Ikiddeh,[13] rather it is defined ad-nauseam as says Luvai.[14]

"The way" is an attempt to put together all positive forces that should be determinants of human life. "The inadequacy if any, lies in the sheer inability of our human capacity to enumerate all these forces and be sure to have exhausted the list. That

again, would be a pedantic exercise. What we should ask is whether the artistic intuition, makes the point, or as it is, underlines the content. Our finding is that Armah more than makes this point.

In our study, some twenty varying elements were counted and identified as constituting the way. Most of these elements were emphasized and repeated an uncountable number of times, and did reflect the effort to involve as wide a spectrum of life as was possible for the writer.

The most universal element of "the way" was, and is, its affirmation of creation. This means life itself is being addressed. The people of the way do not believe in the wanton destruction of life, unless it is (as is always the case with Armah) in the preservation of life, or in its protection. This argument is in itself a reaction to the history of tortures and murders that made the Euro-African encounter such a nightmare to the inferiorized race. In the complete argument for the sanctity of life, Armah distinguishes between the innocence of things themselves and the use to which they are put.

> The root of the disease is not in things themselves but in the use of things; the disease is not in the abundance of things but in relationships growing between users..[16]

The pre-eminent clarification allows the followers of the way to justify their own use of arms in the protection of their life, and in the struggle for their liberation.

The second, and much-emphasized element of the way is "reciprocity". Again, this must be seen as a reaction to the colonial situation in which the plundering of resources in Africa by foreigners, was not reciprocated by a corresponding equivalent either in terms of cash or kind. In harping on reciprocity as a central component of "the way", Ayi Kwei Armah was aware that Africa's richest nation, South Africa, is the world's leading instance of using a people's national resource for such a great advancement but leaving Africans themselves perennially deprived. Reciprocity as a practice of "the way" entails giving and

receiving in turn, as to be distinguished from the imperialist one of receiving only, "...not merely offering. Giving, but only to those from whom we receive in equal measure. Receiving , but only from those whom we give."[16] In a word, exploitation in all its forms is incompatible with the way.

By insisting that reciprocity is cardinal to "the way", Armah manages not only to criticize European imperialism, but also similar practices as they were known and practiced in Africa. In particular, Africans are seen as having been overly generous, even in their initial act of allowing Europeans to settle in their lands, live with them and making use of their food resources at no charges at all. Such practices, because they are not reciprocated as in the European case, amount to, "fatal headless generosity"[17]; "a ruinous openness[18] and, "our vice."[19] There are several other such practices in traditional and even modern Africa, that Armah subjects to this kind of evaluation, and in so doing, questioning their logic. One of these is the notion of heredity of positions of power or rule as practiced in traditional African empires. For Armah, leadership is the equivalent of caretaking of a whole population and it should go to the best qualified person and not to any person whose only qualification is membership to a clan which some vague tradition has unquestioningly given this power. Armah writes that "these are not positions of consumption, but productive agencies requiring care and the patient use of skills exactly learnt. These were not positions generally sought after by self-seekers. They were conferred on people who had proved their worth with no red-eyed straining to push themselves in haughty situations. Now monstrous desires had taken refuge behind arguments revolving about these positions..."[20] The crux of the criticism is that under the unquestioning laws of hereditary rule, it is the buffoon Koranche who inherits the seat of power from his father; the start of a long road to misery and chaos for the people. It is in fact Koranche who betrays his people to foreigners who capture them into slavery. The

story of their enslavement before eventually freeing themselves while being transported to the distant lands, is as we observed one of the major aspects of the novel's plot. In this section of the novel,[21] Armah echoes his own reservations about the Biafran war which happened in the neighboring Nigeria. It is possible to discern his resentment against a deep-seated mentality by some people in Nigeria and Africa in general, that for some reason they are inherently superior to others and must be the unquestioned power holders. In this novel, such mentality is perpetrated by the leopard clan. Armah writes thus:

> ...The arguers among the leopard grew quiet, but plainer than their taciturnity was their dissatisfaction. Their reasons had met defeat in open argument; their passions did not cease boiling in their covert anger. They conceived themselves humiliated. Their candidate... sat daily brooding by himself and spent the energy of his mind contemplating a spiteful emigration with his clan.[22]

The foregoing illustrations highlight two important elements Armah wants clarified about "the way" as a way of life. First, that although the concept of "the way" in the entirety draws its full inspiration from being African and basing most of its tenets on Africanness, this should not be seen as an absolute dogma. Secondly, Armah wants readers to adopt a critical attitude even to things and issues hitherto taken for granted about the African way of life. Armah is thus blatantly anti-negritude specifically because this movement in its call to authentic Africanness, has been rightly noted for its lack of critical rigor in its demand for African cultural promotion. It is a criticism by Armah of the simplicity behind merely longing for a lost Africa and a rejection of the nostalgic presumptions of the existence of a certain African harmony. This is then constituted as the third element of "the way", that it should take pride in our African values, but we should not be slaves to our past: writes the author, the way, "should lead us <u>toward</u> Anoa. Not back to Anoa, not back to any illusory home..."[23]

The authorial voice continues even more succinctly:

> This was to be no blind groping backward along any nostalgic road. This was to be nothing futile. This was not to be a static holding on to that security -

> ultimately directionless - we had found in the present... Better to leave the nostalgic along their backward road. Better to leave those frightened of vision in the static comfort they had found...[24](Emphasis, ours)

This critical nature of presenting Africa is so crucial to our understanding of "the way", as it is to the entirety of the revolutionary content of Two Thousand Seasons. It is specifically this element of the novel that Isidore Okpewho, one of the most perceptive critics of Armah, has laid fingers on:

> What we have in this book is a tale in the oral style alright, but one that is intensely critical rather than eulogistic, or designed to please, one that rejects the present social history of Africa as unrepresentative of its true character and so projects in true prophetic fashion to a vision of an Africa that is free of its shackles and guided by an ideology of religion - the way - on which the race was nurtured from time immemorial.[25]

This "critical capacity" of a tale told in "the oral style", will be further analyzed in our treatment of the third issue that constitutes the revolutionary content in the novel. Yet despite this critical treatment of things African, "the way" as we have observed has its inspiration in the many positive things and strong cultural mores of Africa, which Armah argues, Africans have no reason to abandon. In the treatise, Armah singles out for particular ridicule the practice many Africans have adopted of using foreign names; worshipping using foreign concepts of God, and the like. Christianity is, therefore, ridiculed as "a fable children would laugh at"[26] while Islamic religion introduced by the Arab predators, is a fabrication... " a desert god chanting madness in the wilderness..That is not our way",[27] of fasting as a religious practice by Moslems, our author is even more critical, calling it, "a time of no true fasting but a hypocritical abstinence till dark, then a greedy debauchery of food and drink..."[28] (Emphasis, ours)

But these religions achieved a more gruesome purpose in Armah's analysis, as in history: that of enslaving the victims minds and thus entrenching the process of colonization. On foreign names, Koranche who Armah makes the arch idiot of African royalty, renames his son Bradford-George instead of Bentum. The repeated sarcasm,

"Bentum re-named Bradford-George", is one of the most biting satires on the wole institution of apemanship of foreign culture.

Thus far we have examined some three important elements that define "the way". In subsequent sections, it becomes clear how the novel uses these three premises to advance one of the most revolutionary ideologies in African fiction. The rest of the elements that further vivify the way can but be summarized.

Taking its cue from the critical perspective we have exemplified, "the way" is further seen as the concerted reaction by all concerned Africans against the false histories about Africa which have been cast abroad:

> The air everywhere around is poisoned with truncated tales of our origins. That is also part of the wreckage of our people. What has been cast abroad is not a thousandth of our history, even if its quality were truth.[29]

What Armah is telling us in this very initial pages of the novel is that people of "the way" must begin from a proper understanding of themselves based on proper research about themselves as done by one of their kind. such knowledge becomes the basis of a cultural identity upon which any further quest is founded. In particularly seeing knowledge as a tenet of "the way", Armah emphasizes the need for open-mindedness in the approach, saying, "What we do not know we do not claim to know... we have thought it better to start from sure knowledge, call fables, fables and wait till clarity."[30] This, again conforms to the reactive stance meant to counteract European arrogance of claiming all knowledge even of things unknown such as the origin of the universe.

From sure knowledge, Armah treats "the way" subsequently, as a panacea for African unity, a fact which he says was denied and distorted by the colonial arrangement. In the second section, a broad attempt is made to fictionally explain the rise of the "Askari - Zombi" class, who according to the point of view, were used to help in the process of destroying Africa started by Arabs and white Europeans (also called, "the destroyers" in the

novel). The support given to the king of Poano in the narrative flow, plus the promotion of warring factions within Africa, culminated in the creation of regional boundaries, used to deny the basic unity of Africa. this "wreckage of our people"[31] as Armah calls it, needs "the way" to help bring the continent together.

The concept of "connectedness" is then presented by the writer as part of "the way". In this characteristically peculiar language, Armah is stressing the basic virtues inherent in unity and good human relations, as opposed to the destructive separateness found in white European life-styles. He writes:

> For in the absence of that necessary connectedness of the soul that will live, what is any slave body's freedom but the destroyers licence contemptuously given to the slave to dance the jiving dance of his own death agony? Against the death brought by whiteness, only the greatest connecting force will prevail: The working together of minds connected, souls connected travelling along the one way, our way, the way. Connected thought, connected action: That is the beginning of our journey back to our self, to living again the connected life, travelling again along our way, the way.[32] (Emphasis, ours)

This philosophy of "connectedness" is indispensable in Armah's treatise on guerilla warfare which is useful in political liberation, an aspect of the novel discussed after this. In a nutshell, it underlines the basic requirements of proper co-ordination of the group effort before it can be usefully channelled to a task of the magnitude of fighting for political liberation.

As a logical development of the above, "the way", then gradually becomes what Armah has elsewhere called "praxis".[33] It is an action oriented life, a productive practical life that detests laziness. To highlight praxis as a crucial element of the way, Armah takes readers through a fictional myth describing the reign of women in the fictional country of Anoa, when the versatile and active women overthrew their erstwhile "rulers", the lazy men. To rationalize for a most unproductive life, these men had perpetrated a long-time myth that male bodies were destined for some unspecified "elephant jobs", hence it was the women to perform all tasks of daily existence as the men drank "ahey":

> The women were maintainers, the women were their own protectresses, finders and growers both. The lost exile seeking an end to his loneliness in rape out on the open farms; the huge python blindly spreading the terror gripping it in sudden discovery; the cat of the fields hunting unusual food; the maddened elephant; every danger the women tamed bringing tales and skins and meat home to triumphant husbands...[34]

In his critique and challenge to all menfolk, Armah shows that "ahey", a traditional liquor by implication, did what beer does in modern circumstances: "... bellies like a pregnant woman's, of a habit to consume more food and drink than he gives out work and energy..."[35]. "The way" in this context, therefore, is the necessity for an active life that expects to consume what it has produced and not consumption of things gotten through the familiar practices of dishonesty and stealing. More important in this context however, is the fact that Armah continues to shatter traditional myths that have helped perpetuate such imbalances between men and women as we have alluded to. Looked at in closer detail, we find that this salute to women is a deliberate undertaking to include the often-neglected role of women in situations of political struggle. We see women as the indefatigable companions during the liberation wars, rising to become military commanders who lead menfolks into decisive victories during battles. To begin with, it is Anoa, the first seer from whom the novels fictional setting partially is at. She belongs to the category of "seers" and "utterers" who predict all the present experiences undergone by the rebel group. It is her inspiring faith during her prophecy that assures of "...the rediscovery and following again of our way, the way."[36] It is this that inspires the struggle to its logical end. This is how Armah presents Anoa:

> ...She was slender as a tale stalk, and suppler. From her forehead to her feet, her body was of a deep even blackness that could cause the chance looker to wonder how it was that even the surface of a person's skin could speak of depths. Her grace was easy in the dance...Men not commonly known for their lechery grew itchy-eyed looking at her. Her voice was torture to the greedy ear...[37]

Armah's salutation to women is much more emphatic than this and would require a separate study. What we need to emphasize here is that he creates indomitable female characters in Idawa, Nnoliwe, Ningowe and Abena. Armah of course does not afford us much in terms of the characterization of these women because as we argued before his novel is primarily issue-oriented. It does suffice in our opinion, that the conceptual framework for this novel, provides for a perspective that affirms and recognizes the role of women in political struggle. Part of this process of destroying the myth of women's complacency includes Armah's unequivocal position in this novel; his rejection of notions that assume that women are for use as "things"' "child bearers" or "merely servants in the kitchen". To totally vouchsafe women's liberation, Armah uses the comic title of "Honorary male"[38], ironically created by the embarrassed men, to hide their own fears about the reality of the pressure posed by the women.

To facilitate action, Armah bases "the way" on a careful recreation of the historical experience in our continent. He provides a detailed understanding of the psychology of colonialism as a corroborative to his case on the need for self-realization and knowledge. This is specifically groomed to help in the understanding of the tactful process of mental enslavement which facilitates the entrenchment of colonial power. Armah traces this process with an acute sense of historical detail, but infuses a stimulating intellectual discourse that is at times of a very complex nature to follow. In the novel, this experience can be summarized as involving three historical epochs, namely; the coming of Arabs to Africa, whom Armah calls the "Ostentatious cripples",[39] and at times, "predators" from the desert.[40] This is followed by their introduction into the continent, their weird sexual appetites, later avidly aped by the indigenous elite. They also introduce their islamic religion which as we have observed is regarded by Armah as a hypocritical religion. The only thinkable reason why Armah chooses to present this negative and excessively abusive

picture of the Arabs has to do with their historical role in the introduction and promotion of slavery, which subsequently led to the entire process of European scramble for Africa in the 19th century. This white scramble for Africa leading to the traumatic years of colonialism and slavery, along with its attendant repercussions, especially in the continent, is what Armah presents in this novel as the era of "the destroyers".[41] It is important to emphasize again that this recreation of history is not done in chronological terms. What the novel has done is to present the highlights of the historical experience especially in the negative consequences for the continent, and this is what forms the basis for this quest for "the way", aimed in part, as a prescription from these centuries of sickness.

The upshot is that "the way" develops from this analysis, into a commentary on political experience which as we have seen is firmly rooted in the vagaries of our historical experience. This kind of situation creates the necessity for fighting in order for a people to liberate themselves. As we have noted, it is a gradually unfolding process presented by Armah in a manner that seems to suggest that throughout the "two thousand years" of the fictional imagination, there has always been a people - a minority group, that has stood and acted for the positive good of the community. They have acted as the checks against the excesses of royalty, and overtime, the checks against contemporary forms of dictatorship. Kamuzu in Two Thousand Seasons cuts out the figure of a contemporary dictator, but we see that he is a creation of the colonial past; not to mention its echoes of a sitting president in Africa today. But Kamuzu is not the only one in this allusion to contemporary politics: Armah does not spare his pen in using names that are extremely satirical to well-known personalities in the history of African politics:

> ...What spurious names did we not invent to lull Kamuzu's buffon spirit?
> Osagyefo!
> Kantamanto!
> Kabiyesi!
> Sese!
> Mwenyenguvu!
> Otum tuo!

...Mzee, wisdom's own keeper;
Kabiyesi, leader of men;...[42]

What we are saying is that "the way" is, therefore, conceived as a way to be followed in the daily task of existence. It is also a way to guide mankind along the correct and just paths of life along the well known democratic lines of equality; liberty and freedom. But even more crucial to our analysis here, is the way Armah presents all these as to make them as close to life as possible. For instance, in our following section, we show how "the way" is absolute military competence in a situation where there is actual enemy threat. There must be actual preparedness; training and specific tactic freedom fighters must put to use, so that the struggle is not just rhetoric and "speeches before the enemy".[43] In our argument, this is what strengthens the revolutionary content of the novel. We must thus turn and evaluate the subsequent elements that make the way a precise and specific engagement in a war of liberation.

Guerilla warfare is the strategy by which regular and trained armies are defeated by rebel bands fighting for their freedom. Guerilla warfare is heavily characterized by the unconventional war methods it employs; its strict sense of discipline and the sheer ingenuity by which the usually small rebellious groups manage to contain the whole armies and in so doing gaining some rights, if not total freedom for themselves.

One of the most amazing things in Two Thousand Seasons is Armah's rendition of what is for all practical purposes, "a guerilla warfare". The novel is, as we have endeavoured to point out, an attempt to translate the usually boggling theoretical musings, into a situation of battle. Writing is of itself a far greater remove from revolutionary action, hence Armah's attempt to approximate a novel into a blueprint for some form of military action. In breaking a significant twenty year's silence recently, Armah noted in this respect, that literature for him was "creation at a very low level of intensity..."[44] What

he was expressing was indeed the limitation of art; indeed that creative writing cannot be a substitute for political action. It is with this limitation in mind that we must assess the guerrilla strategies presented in the novel to highlight further, the revolutionary content permeating Armah's works.

The aim of the treatise on liberation (also part of "the way") as given in the text is "to end destruction utterly, to begin the highest, the profoundest work of creation, the work is inseparable from our way, the way."[45] In our analysis, this is a clear movement from the realm of theory into the realm of practice. It begins logically from the position of inculcating a revolutionary consciousness based on the knowledge of the colonial history which we saw as an important requirement of "the way". This consciousness provides the rebelling fighters with the ideological coherence necessary for the sustenance of the fighting spirit as well as the continuity of struggle right into posterity. Thus the powerful authorial voice submits:

> Vision is the aim of this vocation; the clearing of destructions thick-lying pus form eyes too long blinded to every possibility of the way.[46] (Emphasis, ours)

And of the eternity and posterity required of the spirit of revolution, the voice continues, "This life's work, its fruit should be the birth of new seers, other hearers, more numerous utterers."[47] These various categories of people become the messengers of the future struggle. The present is noted as a surrounding "blighted with deaths tinsel," rendering the thoroughness of work, the trueness of the search for our way, the way..."[48] a mandatory and necessary political engagement. This is what justifies the "rebel's" action against their captors, and subsequent action against all forms of destruction practiced by the colonizers and their puppets.

From knowledge and consciousness, the struggle moves to what is unequivocally spelt as action, described as "the only reasonable speech."[49] it is the precise nature of this action that takes a substantial part of the section headed "the voice" and "the return". In

"the return", Sobo, one of the captives, "hatches" the liberating plan. What Sobo does is to suddenly accept the much detested and humiliating post of being a slave driver, a post formerly held by "John" who has presently met his death from one of the captives, "the soft voiced one". The slave driver's post entails mutual trust and confidence of either parties and this is what Sobo cashes on. He is given the keys to the gunpowder store and it is from here that he launches his liberation plan; he perforates the ship from this store to ensure that all the deathly gun powder used in their subjugation is spoilt. From then on, it is nothing but naked confrontation with the white slavers who have captured them. To keep the rest of the captives informed about his plan, there has to be a coded language only understood by the captives. The conspiracy of the captives right before the eyes of their captors thus becomes one of those ingenious inclusions necessary in guerilla operations. Through it, Armah also manages to forge a unity that is inevitable among the oppressed thus completely rising above the disunity the white captors try by all means to perpetuate:

> ...Each group heard and understood every others remeberance through its own interpreters, and separation lost a slight measure of its disastrous hold. Listening minds began to grow connections. The remembrances were separate but underneath them all ran connected meaning...[50]

The subsequent battle involves skilful reconnaissances of this type till the captives gain their freedom and embark on a "return" toward Anoa.

In describing this battles, Armah places emphasis on the difficulties and bottlenecks to give a more credible picture of the situation. In particular, it is the extreme effect, the personal losses and personal desires often known to conflict with the collective spirit such as required here, that are highlighted. We see how Dovi an erstwhile fighter is finished by utter despair upon the death of the loved one, Tawia. Fosu is another one, used by Armah to warn liberators against those who come "talking fire", only to end up being betrayers of the cause. In addition, many of these people are assailed by genuine desires

to go back home, now that some respite has been found. The collective voice however, sees this as a weakness of the mind which must be disciplined for the sake of the majority.

The guerilla strategy includes as we have said, the development of a strong political consciousness. During the action stage, Armah's concept of "connectedness" which variously describes political consciousness and unity, acquires more significance and meaning. It is used to include an international consciousness among all peoples in similar predicament, and the legitimacy of this fight against captivity and slavery in all its forms.

The success of the liberating plan depends on careful preparation; guerilla methods of warfare and great power of will. One of the most memorable bits of Two Thousand Seasons is the part that describes the action of the "soft voiced one".[51] The askaris think him sick beyond any help, but as they prepare to throw him into the sea, he summons a horse's energy and "pours out all the death in him", vomiting into the open mouth of the Askari Zombie":

> ...We saw him with our own eyes bringing up all the bile and dead blood from within his body into his mouth, and this mixture he vomited forcefully into the slave-driver's now captive mouth...Three times with increasing force he pushed them down the slave-driver's reluctant throat. The third time and the slave-driver's resistance was broken, and the sick man shared death with him, allowing not one drop to escape...[52]

This heart-rending action constitutes a surprise and attack strategy crucial in this kind of battle. The violence it entails conforms to what Armah, subscribing to Fanon's theories of revolution, may be seen as "the cleansing violence".[53] This argument is applicable to the equally violent and bestial passages of the sex orgies practiced by the Arabs.[54] These descriptions disturb every reader of Two Thousand Seasons. The sexual excesses of the Arabs are unrepeatable; the power and violence by which habits are brought to an end are primitively wild if not obnoxious - To illustrate:

> ... This is how Hassan died: at the height of his obvious joy a seventh woman unknown to him but known to the other six brought a horn holed at the small end as well as the large and inserted the small end into the Arabs rectum.. It was honey, mixed with lamp oil the mixture heated past

boiling..[55]

Despite this kind of treatment of the issue, what must be appreciated is that the novel's basic philosophy is one that seeks to match violence with equal violence. The sexual abuse of African women by this loathed masters, for every conceivable wild appetite could not in Armah's opinion be compromised by normal realistic language. The action of the women is therefore an integral part of guerrilla warfare and must be seen as part of the self-determination by the women against such glaring exploitation.

Incidents in which guerrilla tricks are utilized to win battles, abound in this novel. But perhaps the best illustration is the bit where Isanusi the prophetic leader of the rebels dresses as a powerful African King and dupes the destroyers that he is a potential ally. With his men ready on standby the rebels manage to overrun the European outpost and conquer it:

> ...Fantastic we looked in our special robes - robes capacious, robes so ample a sufficiency of bullets hidden in the folds of each made no sound at all. Incredible we all looked, but none more amazing to sight than Isanusi himself. Hau! What an imbecility always in the high ceremony of state and royalty...[56]

This particular battle has all the ingredients of authenticity especially in as far as preparation for it is concerned. Elaborate planning procedures are entailed; the forest life in which food, shelter and medication must be got from the natural environment are testimony to Armah's amazing sensitivity to the demands of war situations. There are important details on exactly how these fighters manage a bush life with all its ups and downs. The point about sobriety in such situations which we mentioned in respect of the healing mission proposed in the last novel of our analysis, recurs again. There is no doubt that this is an intended reply to the undisciplined drunkenness known of career soldiers, and how this has often led to their loss of reputation and credibility.

In talking about "guerilla action" and the successes this group scores, it is important to emphasize that the writer does not overglorify his description of the battles. He is explicitly categorical on "over-exitement" over "single battles won"[57] because it would lead to an unnecessary preoccupation with what has been accomplished at the expense of what has yet to be done. What Armah is addressing here is his justified worry over the big problem of sustaining the spirit of a revolutionary work of this nature. He does not undermine the complexities involved and the weakness of the human capacity. The whole question for the writer becomes one, of which "death" we choose, whether as Africans we must be like Koranche the king who "dies" licking the bottom of the Europeans, or die heroically even in the fight for freedom and human dignity. Thus in an impassioned plea, the powerful collective voice ends on the elegiac praise of those who have died even as they fought for freedom:

> Death took the fighter Oko, disdainful of weapons, trusting most his hands and his natural strength. A destroyer's bullet found his eye and closed it. Suma too, and Pili they are gone. Naita calls to Makaa in the night - in vain. Ndlela too has fallen seeking paths to the way again. Where is Ashate; where is Kamara now? ...new women, new men, take your place but our remembrance will always be heavy with your absence and the presence of the things you did.[58]

This, it will be agreed, is a moving ode for fallen fighters, underscoring the virtue of heroic death for the sake of freedom and dignity. The roll-call method employed here shall be evaluated at a later stage. For the present concern, it must be seen as the "Luta continua" of the novel, and of the positive human struggles as it were. And in the last word, "this reign of destroyers cannot reach beyond these two thousand seasons"[59] is a defiant confidence. What's more, Armah makes a remarkable contribution to the whole question of revolutionary commitment, as it analyses the practice of guerilla warfare to overthrow an oppressive establishment.

Finally, the artistic strategies employed in this novel cups our case for art as used in the service of a revolutionary content. The artistic excellence of Two Thousand Seasons remains one of its most outstanding characteristics when talking about a revolutionary content in a clearly revolutionary novel. It has been legitimately seen as an epic performance, and the fact that this is not of the "eulogizing" type has been particularly noted.[60] What we need to add to the learned contributions of Okpewho and Ngara (who has exemplified the linguistic prowess of the novel[61]), is but an explanation. The ancient art of epic narration in Africa, was a specialized trade of select bards or griots as they were known in West Africa. Their role was essentially to sing praises for kings and rulers with a view to preserving the prevailing social order. Thus the brief in the Sundiata epic asserts:

> Since time immemorial the Kouyates have been in the service of the Keita princes of Mali, we are vessels of speech, we are the repositories which harbour secrets many centuries old... without us the names of the kings would vanish into oblivion.[62]

In Two Thousand Seasons, the powerful epic form has not been used to serve kings in this manner. It is instead used to expose the penchant contradictions of these feudal myths, and in fact, critique them. the critical nature of this usage is to be found for instance in the critique of the Arab predators:

> ...Who asks to hear the mention of the predators names? Who would hear again the cursed names of the predator chieftains? With which stinking name shall we begin?[63]

We see here the powerful rhetorical questioning widely used in epics and the simultaneous negative references as in "stinking".

In the revolutionary sense of this study, we find that words have been used almost in their literal meanings to give a distinctly "African novel" despite the contradiction inherent in the English language usage. This makes the epic flavour and power of eloquence be retained even in the English constructions. Thus, people who want to marry

beautiful women like Idawa, are called "askers", a word that captures the African conceptual meaning of this institution; "utterers", "rememberers", "seers" are nouns created from verbs, and Armah uses such nouns an uncountable number of times in the text, and going a long in liberating his personal discomfort with the rules of standard English. Many expressions are given an African flavour, such as "the Earth was ready for seed"; or "you speak truth". After a long deviation from the immediate line of narrative, we have as Armah's standard practice, the usage "to return".

What we are illustrating here is that the writer of Two Thousand Seasons, perfectly sensitive to the contradiction of writing in a language associated with one's slavery and colonialism has revolutionized it, to enhance the revolutionary nature of the message. This pattern continues even in the identification of professional categories. Rulers are thus "care-takers"; people who lead the initiators (rebels) in their search for refuge are "path-finders". We, in addition, have masters of hunting, boat making, weaving and the professional speech-makers like Isanusi and Otumfur. Through all these representations, a reader of Two Thousand Seasons finds himself deeply immersed in an authentic struggle with an African setting.

The epic grandeur of Two Thousand Seasons initially derives from this purifying force of words. Secondly, it has to do with the usage and arrangement within the novel's entire structure. Ngara states it as "the skilful balancing of words, clauses and sentences, and the intensity of feeling."[64] but his suggestions that this leads to "a very readable"[65] novel is highly debatable. We find in our analysis that the capacity for an emphatic statement which Armah achieves very well has to do with the overbearing repetition he makes of such key issues such as "the way" and the elements that go into its definition. He also achieves this, through some very emphatic images (to be highlighted presently). Yet, still it would be difficult for any reader to pass this novel as "an easily readable one",

or even vivid and coherent. Mr. Luvai notes from his experience with third years at the University of Nairobi, that the hostile, lukewarm reception, and the "mixed feelings" for Two Thousand Seasons, among other Armah works, has to do with their "habitualization" of conventional categories of literature and, therefore, the failure to respond imaginatively to the "unfamiliar".[66] Because this novel in many ways does not conform or "behave"[67] familiarly, it is our case that it has a veritable amount of "difficulty" that makes it very heavy going indeed. The prologue is for instance, italized in print, with some of the longest sentence structures in the novel. Its treatment of the all-consuming imagery of the headwater and flood-water as well as the desert and the spring relationship are highly thought provoking. It is our argument, therefore, that "difficulty" is a sustained artistic strategy throughout Armah's novels. It is a novel no one can pretend to have been written for mass consumption, even as it heavily puts a case for the African masses. In fact, it is no surprise that Gikandi poses this aspect as the main criticism of Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah, that "their stylistic perfection mitigates against the establishment of a live dialogue with the majority of the people they speak for...[68]

An explanation of three leading images used in the novel may suffice to illustrate the deep-seated intellectual nature of this novel. In the prologue as we have said, is the imagery of desert and spring water or one of headwater and floodwater, described thus:

> Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes...
> Woe the headwater needing to give, giving only to floodwater flowing desertward. Woe the link form spring to stream...No spring changes the desert. The desert remains; the spring runs dry. Not one spring; not thirty, not a thousand springs will change the desert...[69]

The all consuming nature of the desert is attested to by the actions of the desert men (the Arab-predators in the novel). The ironical situation in which the tiny spring-water feeds the stream, and eventually the floodwater while it ends up dry is telling enough. Armah is conceptualizing an exploitative relationship that has characterized the

historical relationship with foreigners in general, and the early Arab slavers in particular.

In the second instance, we have the most revolutionary use of imagery, in the whole novel: The choice of the vulture as the writers emblem of "the way":

> Our people had prepared themselves for the coming confusion by choosing a cry of recognition, the call of the black vulture. Afterwards those who had been directly in the fight adopted the vulture as their double. Let the ignorant laugh at such identification. We listen to their mindless laughter, see their brainless faces. Of the vulture, what is it they know? That bird that lives off carrion but never kills a living thing that has not first attacked it, that bird is also of the way.[70] (Emphasis, ours)

What is significant here is the overturning of the symbol of the vulture into an expression of African virtues, rather than what he considers as the ignorant misuse by Americans, whose catalogue of unprovoked attacks and killings in different parts of the world, need not be re-stated.

The epic achievement of Two Thousand Seasons will continue to merit more scholarly attention than this study can claim to have done. To avoid an unrealistically voluminous thesis, we have thus tried to highlight only some of the aspects of the artistic qualities of this novel to demonstrate how "art" has been used to service a revolutionary content. The use of the critical epic strategy, the oratory and eloquence that the "we" voice carries are only a few areas of an epic style that scholars will want to do further research on. More pertinently, will be the need to demonstrate how Armah's work here approximates an epic performance with a live audience such that epic qualities are not entirely lost even in writing. We have in mind such strategy as the use of "a direct address system" which presupposes an audience, a feature that dominates the novel quite a bit. Armah also uses "a roll- call technique", in which the subject of his praise or criticism as the situation demands, are named in a rhetorical manner as though to approximate a response.

We do conclude, therefore, by saying that Two Thousand Seasons has an overriding beauty in its artistic strategy even where words are used to describe the negative aspects of human life, to such an extent that separate study would do more justice to it.

Finally, it is the recasting of the whole concept of blackness into a new historical light, while reversing "whiteness" into another, that concludes a most revolutionary use of imagery. Whiteness in the novel is a symbol for negative destruction and death, repeated and condemned for the umpteenth time:

> Ask the destroyed. They alone can tell you, they who have been taken into whiteness, if they still have voices to tell you what they have seen they will let you know of time ignorant dusks, of time without dawns, time with no night and dawn again...which remembrance of that dead time shall we pick for your hearing? ...[71]

Blackness is on the other hand positive and welcoming. it is in fact the mythical African darkness that becomes the spiritual yearning of the freedom seekers.

> What we sought was darkness: The darkness of forests, darkness to let broken things grow whole again, darkness origin of life. Behind us we thought we had forever left the white abomination: violence in its pure state, hatred unmixed.[72]

This recasting through a "coup-de-tat" on imagery will again be admitted as an up-paralleled revolutionary content.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The main object of this study was to define and analyze what it identified as the "revolutionary content" of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels. It also aimed at focusing on the fourth novel, Two Thousand Seasons. To achieve a complete literary study, we aimed at identifying artistic strategies of the writer which enable him communicate a revolutionary message. In Chapter 1, we endeavoured to show the radical and the revolutionary practice to which the writer subscribes. We defined the concept of revolutionary content which the study uses extensively, as generally having to do with the quest for change, the quest for alternatives and new approaches which are necessary in social, economic and political aspects of African life.

When Ayi Kwei Armah broke his twenty-year silence, we were working on the initial draft of this thesis. This more than confirmed our earlier speculations about the man. He made a comment which echoed what we had adopted in part as our theoretical framework:

> I believe the writer is not the focus. The focus should be on the works, not the writer...the work is there for the readers to interpret.[1]

It was our stated approach to focus entirely on the texts of Armah's works as the key to our findings rather than to rely on self-publicist statements. We also tried as much as possible, to approach Armah's works with as open a mind as possible. In our reading of these works, we became aware that Ayi Kwei Armah did not conform to the rule of creating typical characters under typical circumstances", as was formulated by Engels to be the cine-quanon for the realistic novel.[2] In our study, we found that the more yielding, approach was one of accepting Armah's iconoclasm.

The above approach has enabled us come up with the conclusions regarding content, and the artistic strategy adopted by writers who are decisively revolutionary. We found that, because Armah had an initial inclination to practice and not to theorize action and not mere words, his personal disappointment led him to transfer all the venom into the works, and especially into Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers. These were very clear in the first novel, The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born. In the third novel, Why Are We So Blest?, the disappointments were aggravated by the realization that intellectuals were still seen as an important elite whose roles must remain in the theoretical indulgence with books, and not in the actual battlefront.

We also highlighted the specific disappointment with the general political performance which Armah treats extensively in The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, and in Fragments. Two Thousand Seasons tried to approximate a battle against the enemy forces, organized along guerilla military strategies. We saw that the foundation of this was "the way", a process and an ideology that begins from an attempt to understand the historical origins of continental Africa's problems. We saw that The Healers climaxed this search for historical origins, but went further to prescribe Armah's most cherished regenerative value: Healing of the mind, a proposal that entails coming up, therefore, with polished and serene values as the foundation for life.

The context in which Ayi Kwei Armah operates is, as we have argued grossly wanting in terms of correct values and notions to guide us towards better life. In particular post-independence Ghana had merely inculcated materialism and rationalized corruption as its life style. These values were a product of a poor political guidance, and in fact, naked treachery on the part of those entrusted with the task of leadership. Yet the biggest regret was that even with changes in the leadership, there was no systematic attention given to overhaul the wrong mentalities that was leading Ghana into becoming

one of the most corrupt nations of the world.

By the time of writing Fragments, Armah the observant critic, had realized the presence of yet a more serious element accounting for this regrettable state of affairs. It was the denigration of all indigenous African values by everybody, right from the top, in favor of the flamboyance of often ill-conceived western values. By the time of the fourth novel, white Europe had become the single most important enemy. The precise methodology of breaking away from Europe underlies the material of Two Thousand Seasons, and Why Are We So Blest?

In Two Thousand Seasons, action or praxis, are the premise, and in every little battle won by the rebel-initiates, Armah was out to affirm the sanctity of life itself. We highlighted some specific aspects of the artistic qualities of the novel that combined with the content to make a "revolutionary novel". The particular inversion of the epic form and utilizing the same to criticize, was singled out as central to the techniques used by the writer. Two Thousand Seasons was designed to be a "difficult" rather than simple novel. The thematic and stylistic intricacy of The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born was noted in chapter two. And while one would have thought that Fragments and Why Are We So Blest? nearly moved to the realistic category, in the sense of better character development and more authentic setting, their structuring rendered them as demanding and taxing for the intellect. It thus became almost inevitable that we used the concept of "metaphysical art" to underline the sophistication in communication in thought and subsequently the imagery. The grim imagery of imperialist tendencies; the often explosive vivid re-creation of Arab debauchery facilitated the corresponding reaction from the enslaved, as it were, the purging of violence with equal violence. Vivid descriptions were seen as Armah's strategies especially in focussing characters like Koomson and Brempong intended for satire and ridicule. The same degree of lucidity was employed in putting headlong rush for material

gain, into criticism and condemnation.

The specific contribution of this study arises from the analysis of the revolutionary voice which rings from Armah's first novel to the last. We have identified what seems to constitute the quest for the author's change and the concern for it. In our main novel of analysis, Two Thousand Seasons, this consisted of the practical nature of the demands of "the way" ideology and the accompanying approximation of war. In the other novels it consisted of the peculiar characterization, in which the heros were engaged in a heroic, single handed rebellion against the all consuming filth and corruption. The spiritual basis of healing grew and developed as one of the most radical challenges in African fiction.

The presentation of a revolutionary vision inevitably involved the utilization of revolutionary art Forms and we saw how Armah broke away from conventions especially in Two Thousand Seasons. But even more pronounced was the way in which characterization in the sense of psychological depth, suffered as well as the authenticity of setting in terms of particularity and place, save for The Healers. This strategy was an inevitable consequence of what we saw as the writers pre-occupation with issues, and their broad significance for Africa as a whole, rather than for Ghana or any other country specifically. The concept of art and revolutionary content as discussed here, are essentially the dictates of potentially repressive societies whether pre-colonial, colonial or post-colonial. It is such repression that conditions "difficulty" as an artistic strategy, as well as the revolutionary content.

It is simply impossible to give a final assessment of Armah's artistic strategy in one study of this length. A study devoted to Armah's symbolism and imagery would be a suitable area for further research. We have not had enough time to detail Armah's treatment of women. This too is an area which has had almost no scholarly attention at all. In more general terms, we realized that a novel like Two Thousand Seasons, just like

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25.Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1974).

26.Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons. (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973

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28.This is the familiar summary of Armah's biography on most jacket blurbs of his novels.

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31.See interview with Dimgba Igwe in African Concord (London: Heinemann 1975) pp. 25-26

32.Dr. Henry Indangasi, op.cit.

33.Chinua, Achebe, Mourning Yet on Creation Day, (Essays), (London: Heinemann 1975) pp. 25-26

34.Charles Nnolim, "Dialectic as form: Perjorism in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah." in E.D. Jones (Ed). African Literature Today. No. 10. (London: Heinemann, 1979) pp. 207-223.

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36.See interview with Dimgba Igwe in African Concord op.cit. p.18

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47.For an elaboration of this "ideology" employed by Armah, see our analysis of Two Thousand Seasons, Chapter 3 of this study.

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9.Ibid

10. Ibid. p. 26

11.Charles Nnolim, "Dialectic as form: Perjorism in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah in E.D.Jones(ED) African Literature Today No. 10. (London: Heinemann, 1979) pp. 207-223

12.Ibid. p. 208

13.Eldred Jones, op.cit.

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15.Dennis Brutus qualifies "the power of words to wound" in "Postscripts" of Letters to Martha. (London: Heinemann, 1968) p.20

16.Chinua Achebe, op.cit.

17.Camara Laye: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o; Dennis Hills...etc are among the writers who African regimes have indicated on the imaginary assumption that their characters seem to act like or even resemble the heads of state in respective countries.

18.The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born. op.cit. p.40

19.Ibid. pp. 47-49

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21.Ibid. pp 9-10

22.Ibid. p. 51

23.Neil Lazarus, "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will: A reading of Ayi Armah's The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born" (Unpublished material) p.5

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41. Ibid pp. 88-89

42. Ibid, p. 81

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81.Ibid p. 66

82. Ibid, p. 76

83. Ibid, p. 22

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97. Ibid

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27. Ibid, p. 4 (with our emphasis)

28. Ibid, p. 66 (with our Emphasis)

29. Ibid, pp. 1-2

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31. Ibid, pp. 1-2

32. Ibid, p. 209

33. Ayi Kwei Armah, "Masks and Marx (op.cit.) p. 36, Praxis here seen as actual revolutionary participation to overthrow oppressive social systems.

34.Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons. op. cit. p.16

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36.Ibid. p. 25

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38.Ibid,

39.Ibid. pp. 30-52

40.Ibid. p. 53

41.Ibid. from p.17

42.Ibid. pp. 267; 269: There's no doubt that Ayi Kwei Armah intends a satire on the well known pioneer African heads of State: Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana); Kamuzu Banda (Malawi) and Mzee Kenyatta (Kenya)

43.Ayi Kwei Armah, "Masks and Marx", op.cit. pp. 63-64

44.Ayi Kwei Armah, interviews with Dimgba Igwe African Concord (p. 18) 7th way, 1987. This was Armah's first press interview in nearly twenty years as a writer.

45.Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons. op.cit. p.246

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47.Ibid,

48.Ibid

49.Ibid

50.Ibid pp. 195-196

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53.The notion of "cleansing violence" as used by Fanon, The Wretched of The Earth op.cit. p. 74

54.See in particular Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons. op.cit. pp. 34-79

55.Ibid. p.38

56.See Ibid. pp. 254-258, for the full description of this attack.

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CHAPTER 4 ENDNOTES

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